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THE CONSTABLE DE BOURBON BY AINSWORTH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Oh, the Bourbon! the Bourbon!
  Sans country or home,
We'll follow the Bourbon,
  To plunder old Rome.

BYRON.

THE

CONSTABLE DE BOURBON.

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE AFFRONT.

THE CONSTABLE DE BOURBON.

I.

Fontainebleau.

On a fine day, in the early part of June, 1523, a splendid cavalcade, consisting of three hundred well-mounted gentlemen, habited in velvet, and each having a massive gold chain round his neck, entered the Forest of Fontainebleau from the side of Nemours, and proceeded along an avenue bordered by noble trees towards the palace.

For the most part,. the persons composing this brilliant troop were young and handsome cavaliers, whose looks and haughty bearing proclaimed their high birth, but there were some veterans among them, whose bronzed visages and martial deportment showed that they had served in many a hard campaign. But all were equally richly attired in the sumptuous livery of their leader — black velvet embroidered with gold — and their pourpoints and

the housings of their steeds bore a princely badge, woven in gold, together with a sword wrought in the same material, which denoted that their lord held the office of Constable, one of the highest military dignities of France.

The leader of the troop, a very striking personage, whom it was impossible to regard without interest, was a man of large stature, with handsome, strongly-marked features, very stern in expression. An ample chest and muscular throat indicated the possession of great personal strength, but his frame, though stalwart, was admirably proportioned, and it was easy to discern, from the manner in which he bestrode his steed — a powerful black charger — that he was a consummate horseman. His looks and deportment were those of one accustomed to command. If not absolutely young, he was in the very prime of life, being just thirty-three. His complexion was swarthy, his eyes dark and piercing, and his beard, which he wore exceedingly long, black as jet. His firm-set mouth betokened inflexible resolution, while his towering forehead indicated great sagacity. Though he was magnificently arrayed, his bearing showed that he was not one of the silken gallants who thronged the gay and chilvalrous court of François I., and who delighted in the banquet, the masquerade, or the

tournay — but a hardy warrior, who had displayed prowess in the field, and could lead hosts to conquest.

Like his followers, this noble-looking personage was clad in black velvet, but his habiliments were ornamented with precious stones. His girdle was set thick with gems, as was the handle of his poniard, and his plumed toque was ornamented in a similar manner. Around his neck he wore the superb collar of the order of Saint Michael, bestowed upon him by François I., and upon the caparisons of his steed was embroidered a sword, a symbol of the dignity with which he had been invested some eight years ago, on the accession of the Duke d'Angoulême to the throne of France.

This noble warrior, who equalled Roland in bravery and military science, was the illustrious Charles de Bourbon, Constable of France. At this time Bourbon was the most redoubtable person in the kingdom, as well from his daring and ambitious character, as from the power which he derived from his vast possessions. As the second prince of the blood — the Duc d'Alençon being the first — he was not many degrees removed from the throne, which the descendants of his house occupied at a later period. Sprung from Saint Louis, by that monarch's sixth son, he was head of the branch

Bourbon-Montpensier, and had espoused Suzanne, daughter of the Duchess Bourbon-Beaujeu, herself the eldest daughter of Louis XI., and widow of Duke Pierre de Bourbon. The Duchess Suzanne had died about six months previously, leaving Bourbon without issue, for her three children had preceded her to the grave.

The Constable de Bourbon's possessions were immense. Whole provinces belonged to him, in which he exercised feudal sovereignty. His titles were Duke de Bourbon, Duke d'Auvergne, Comte de Montpensier, Comte de Forez, Comte de la Marche, Vicomte of Carlat and Murat, and Seigneur of Combrailles and La Roche en Reigniers. In Poitou he had the duchy of Châtelleraut, and in Picardy the earldom of Clermont. These vast possessions, combined with his pretensions to the throne and ambitious character, naturally excited the jealousy of François I. Other causes conspired to heighten the king's dislike of him. The victory of Marignan, which signalised the first campaign of François in Italy, and gained for him the duchy of Milan, was virtually won by Bourbon. Though the Constable did not boast of the achievement, his haughty manner offended the king, who sought on several occasions to lower his pride, but only succeeded in irritating him.

In Louise de Savoie, Duchess d'Angoulême, and mother of the king, Bourbon found an active and powerful enemy. Though she was thirteen years older than the Constable, the duchess had conceived a violent passion for him, and, in order to forward his ambitious views, Bourbon feigned to respond to it. But he soon threw off the mask, and treated her with indifference. For a time, the Duchess d'Angoulême contented herself with brooding over her wrongs, perhaps believing her faithless lover would return, but when he completed his perfidy by uniting himself to Suzanne de Bourbon-Beaujeu, an alliance which greatly increased his wealth and power, by uniting two branches of the family, the hostility of the duchess took a more decided form. By her advice the large pensions bestowed upon Bourbon by the king were recalled, and other indignities were offered him.

Bourbon was too proud to complain of these unworthy proceedings, but his mother-in-law, the haughty old Duchess de Bourbon-Beaujeu, sought an interview with the Duchess d'Angoulême, and bitterly reproached her with the injustice done to her son-in-law. The indignation and menaces of the daughter of Louis XI. produced some effect, and the Duchess d'Angoulême promised that the pensions should be restored. But she did not keep her word.

Bourbon worthily avenged himself by making it

manifest that he was independent of court patronage. On the birth of his son he prayed the king to stand sponsor for the child, and François assented. The baptismal ceremony took place at the Château de Moulins, and the entertainments given on the occasion were on a scale of more than regal splendour, the Constable's retinue being larger and more magnificent than that of the king. François was greatly offended at this display, and his mother took advantage of his anger to propose to him a scheme for the complete humiliation of the haughty duke. This was no less than to despoil Bourbon of all his vast possessions — an iniquitous design which she proposed to accomplish by setting up a claim to the succession as direct heiress of the elder branch of the house of Bourbon. The claim was as unjust as iniquitous, but the Chancellor Duprat, who owed his post to her, and who was her confidant and adviser, told her that by suborning the judges, and by using all the influence of the king, it could be established. For a long time François refused to listen to the odious proposition, but his mother persisted, and in the end he yielded. The duchess was aided in her vindictive plan by the numerous enemies whom Bourbon's pride had raised up against him, but chiefly by the king's favourite, the Admiral Bonnivet, the rival and enemy of the Constable.

Bonnivet, of whom we shall have to speak more fully anon, was the handsomest man at court, and distinguished as much for his gallantry as for his remarkable graces of person. Envy of Bourbon's rank and power, apprehension that he might regain his influence over the Duchess d'Angoulême, and through her govern the king, conspired to make Bonnivet dread and detest the Constable, and he became a ready instrument in the duchess's hands, losing no opportunity of inflaming the king's anger against the best and bravest of his nobles. A scornful remark of Bourbon converted Bonnivet into an implacable enemy, and made him eager for the Constable's destruction. A magnificent fête was given by the Admiral at his château in Poitou. Resolved that Bourbon should witness his rival's splendid hospitality, the king took him to Bonnivet's château, and thinking to mortify him, asked him if he did not think it splendid?

"I have only one fault to find, sire," replied Bourbon. "The cage is too large and too fine for the bird."

"You are piqued, cousin," rejoined the king. "You are jealous of the Admiral."

"I jealous of Bonnivet!" exclaimed Bourbon, with deep scorn. "How could I be jealous of one

whose ancestors would have deemed it an honour to be esquires in my house?"

This bitter speech was reported by the king to his favourite, and, as we have said, rendered the latter Bourbon's implacable foe.

From this moment, Bonnivet wanted no urging from the Duchess d'Angoulême to injure Bourbon in the king's opinion. Nothing but the downfal of the Constable would now content him. Moved by his favourite's representations, which were seconded by the wily Duprat, and yielding to his own jealous feelings, the king at last gave consent to a measure which was fraught with disastrous consequences to himself, and nearly cost him his throne. A feudal process was commenced by the Duchess d'Angoulême, designed to dispossess the Constable de Bourbon of his vast territories. This suit, impolitic as well as unjust, was sustained by the king's advocate, Lizet, and by the duchess's advocate, Guillaume Poyet. It was impolitic, we say, for it was undertaken at a juncture when a war with the Emperor Charles V. caused François to require the aid of all his great nobles, and especially of so sagacious a commander as Bourbon. From its importance and long duration, and from the illustrious personages concerned in it, the process excited the attention of all Europe, and the wily Emperor failed not to take advantage

of the opportunity of alienating so able a commander as Bourbon, and caused secret overtures to be made to him. Henry VIII., also discerning the great mistake that François had committed, entered into a league with the Emperor to reduce the power of France. Both these monarchs regarded Bourbon as the most important auxiliary they could obtain; but François, insensible to the danger, allowed the process to go on. That the issue would be adverse to the Constable, little doubt could be entertained. The Parliament of Paris showed themselves disposed to comply with the king's wishes, and it was almost certain that a decree would be pronounced in favour of the Duchess d'Angoulême. But before the matter was decided, Suzanne de Bourbon died, leaving the duke, as we have stated, without issue.

This event, which revived the smouldering fire in the breast of the Duchess d'Angoulême, and awakened new hopes, caused her to suspend operations for a time. Bourbon had been a widower for six months, during which he had remained at the Château de Moulins, when he was summoned by the king to Fontainebleau, and set out at once, attended as was his custom, by a numerous and splendid escort. He rested on the last night of his journey at the Château de Nemours, in order to reach Fontainebleau at noon.

Amid the crowd of nobles and gentlemen who accompanied him were René de Bretagne, Comte de Penthièvre, and Jean de Poitiers, Seigneur de Saint-Vallier and Comte de Valentinois. The latter belonged to one of the oldest families in France, and had been governor of Dauphiné during the reign of the late king Louis XII. He had raised a large number of men for François I. during the war in Italy, and, like Bourbon, had good cause to complain of the king's neglect and ingratitude. Saint-Vallier's daughter, the beautiful Diane de Poitiers, had recently married Louis de Brézé, Comte de Maulévrier, grand seneschal of Normandy. Saint-Vallier was somewhat stricken in years, his beard and locks were grizzled, and his noble countenance had a grave and melancholy expression, as if he foresaw the misfortunes in store for him. He was a man of the highest honour, and Bourbon, who had great faith in his judgment, generally consulted him. Of the gentlemen in attendance upon the Constable, the two in whom he chiefly confided were the Seigneurs Pompérant and Lurcy, both young men of good family, graceful in exterior, mettlesome, proud, and eager for distinction.

Since the accession of François I., the old feudal château of Philippe Auguste and Saint Louis had been almost entirely demolished, and had given

place to a superb palace, reared in the style of the Renaissance. François I. had not as yet completed his grand designs, but he had done enough to make the Palace of Fontainebleau one of the noblest structures in France. Its splendid apartments were full of objects of art, paintings, and sculpture brought from Italy, and its glorious gallery, just completed, was richly decorated. The old walls and moat of the mediæval château had given place to delicious gardens, with broad terraces, parterres, alleys, fountains, lakes, bosquets, and all that could contribute to enjoyment. As Bourbon drew near the palace, and gazed at its magnificent façade, he could not refuse it the meed of admiration it so well deserved.

The approach of the Constable and his suite was watched by a number of arquebusiers, pages, grooms, and serving-men, collected in the outer court, or grouped upon the great horse-shoe stairs leading to the principal entrance of the palace. Various comments were made by these persons on the number and splendour of the Constable's retinue, and the general opinion seemed to be that the king would take offence at the display. Among the observers were two magnificently-attired seigneurs, who, being stationed on the summit of the lofty stairs, commanded a complete view of the scene. Evidently,

from the respect with which they were treated, these persons were of the highest rank. The most noticeable of the two — though both were noticeable — was a very distinguished-looking man, in age about thirty-five, though he did not look so much, and possessing features of classical regularity, and a figure of incomparable grace. In stature he was a little above the ordinary height, and his deportment was haughty and commanding. His rich brown locks were shorn close, as was then the mode, and he wore a pointed beard à l'Espagnole. Both for his graceful exterior and fascinating manner he seemed formed to captivate, and indeed almost all those whom he had addressed — and he made the highest dames his mark — had found him irresistible. He was accounted the handsomest, as well as the most accomplished cavalier at court, and excelled all his compeers in manly exercises, as he surpassed them in grace.

This preux chevalier was Guillaume Gouffier de Boisy, Seigneur de Bonnivet, Admiral of France. From the favour bestowed upon him by his royal master, he was called "le Grand Mignon du Roi." Audacious in love as in war, equally at home in the mêlée or at the masked ball, Bonnivet was the most gallant and profligate personage of the most gallant and profligate court in Europe. He had

fought by the side of his royal master at the battle of Marignan, and was subsequently sent by François as ambassador-extraordinary to England, where he distinguished himself at the gorgeous court of Henry VIII. by his unparalleled magnificence. Brave to a fault, rash, enterprising, spiritual, lively, a boon companion, inordinately addicted to gallantry, Bonnivet exactly suited the king. A perfect courtier, he maintained his influence over François, while he strengthened his position by ingratiating himself with the king's mother. His prodigality was excessive, and his audacity in love affairs unparalleled. If we are to believe Brantôme, he resorted to the most extraordinary stratagems in the prosecution of his amours, and had trap-doors contrived in the chambers of his château. He was the secret lover of the king's mistress, the beautiful Comtesse de Châteaubriand, and he even dared to raise his eyes to the Duchess d'Alençon, the king's sister. To Louise de Savoie he was so subservient, that he became little better than her tool, but she requited him by showering favours on his head. It was by her desire that the command of the army of Guienne was bestowed upon him; and he had but recently returned to court, flushed with the successes he had gained over the Spaniards in Fontarabia. Vain and presumptuous, Bonnivet had offended most

of the old commanders, but, being supported by the king and the duchess, he was unassailable.

The person who stood next to Bonnivet, and who watched Bourbon's approach with as much surprise and as much curiosity as the Admiral, was very different in appearance and manner from the royal favourite, though equally rich attired. Though not handsome, he had a striking countenance, and his deportment was proud and martial. He was no other than the renowned Anne de Montmorency, one of the haughtiest and wealthiest nobles of France, and one of the bravest of her captains. Though he did not envy Bonnivet the king's favour, nor seek to supplant him, he held him in contempt, and would probably have rejoiced in his downfal. Montmorency belonged to a ruder and hardier school than that represented by the Admiral, and had distinguished himself by many feats of arms and personal courage. On account of his valour and military skill he had just been named a marshal of France by the king.

"By Heaven! it *is* the Constable de Bourbon!" cried Bonnivet. "What brings him to Fontainebleau?"

"I know not," replied Montmorency, "but I trust he may be restored to the king's favour, and this abominable process abandoned."

"That is not likely to be the case," remarked Bonnivet. "If Bourbon humbles himself, the king may overlook his faults — not otherwise."

"I have yet to learn what faults he has committed," said Montmorency. "I know he has been unjustly treated, and so I shall not hesitate to tell the king."

"You had better not say as much to the duchess," remarked Bonnivet.

"Wherefore not?" demanded the marshal. "If this suit is pressed to an issue, mischievous consequences are sure to follow, and I therefore hope it may be amicably arranged. From Bourbon's appearance here, I augur favourably. If I can help to set the matter right, I will."

"Take my advice, marshal, and do not meddle in the matter," said Bonnivet. "You will only incur the duchess's displeasure."

"I care not for that," said Montmorency.

"And yet it is to the duchess you owe your bâton. You are ungrateful, monsieur le maréchal."

These words were not uttered by Bonnivet, but by a singular personage, who had approached them unawares, and listened to their discourse. On turning, Montmorency beheld Triboulet, the king's jester. The court buffoon wore the parti-coloured garb proper to his office, and carried a bauble

in his hand. Misshapen in person, he had high shoulders, long arms, large feet and hands, and an immense head. His brow was low, his eyes lighted up by a malicious flame, and his countenance altogether had a cunning and mischievous expression, which inspired fear while it excited mirth.

Immediately behind Triboulet stood a tall, thin man, whose appearance offered a striking contrast to that of the jester. This personage wore a black taffeta robe with loose sleeves, and a silken skull-cap of the same hue, which set off his sallow features. His eyes were thoughtful in expression, and a long grey beard, descending to his girdle, added materially to the gravity of his aspect. This individual was the renowned Cornelius Agrippa, who after many years of travel and strange adventure in Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries, and England, now formed part of the royal household of France, and occupied the post of physician and astrologer to the Duchess d'Angoulême, who had great faith in his medical and mystic lore. Though the courtiers affected to deride Agrippa's predictions, and sometimes charged him with dealing in the black art, they nevertheless stood in great awe of him.

"Why dost charge me with ingratitude, thou ribald knave?" said Montmorency to the jester.

"Because you turn upon your benefactress," replied Triboulet.

"Bah! I have got no more than my due," said Montmorency. "Thou shouldst talk of my ingratitude to the duchess — à propos of the Constable de Bourbon."

"Her highness has no reason to be grateful to the Constable," said Triboulet, with a strange grin.

"But the king has," rejoined Montmorency. "Without him, Marignan would scarce have been won. I would rather lose my marshal's bâton than Bourbon should be deprived of his possessions."

"The king shall hear of this," muttered Bonnivet. "Did the stars tell you that Bourbon would come here to-day, learned sir?" he added to Cornelius Agrippa.

"I expected him," replied the philosopher.

"Then possibly you know his errand?" continued Bonnivet, with an incredulous smile.

"I know it," replied Agrippa, gravely. "I could tell you why he comes, and what will befal him, but I care not to read the future to those who mock my lore. The star of Bourbon is temporarily obscured. But it will break out with added splendour. This day is the turning-point of his destiny. If he stays here he will be great — but if he departs he will be greater."

"How are we to interpret that, compère?" inquired Triboulet.

"As you will," rejoined Agrippa, contemptuously. "The words of wisdom are unintelligible to fools. But mark me, messeigneurs," he added to Bonnivet and Montmorency; "the destinies of the king, the duchess, and the Constable, are this day linked together — but the influencing power resides in Bourbon."

"Why in him? Explain your meaning, doctor!" demanded Bonnivet.

"I have said all I care to say," replied Agrippa. "But here comes the Constable. Will you stay and bid him welcome?"

"No, I will in, and inform the king of his arrival," said Bonnivet.

"You will find his majesty in the grand gallery," said Agrippa. "I left him there, not many minutes since, with the Comtesse de Châteaubriand."

"I will go thither," replied Bonnivet, hastening across the vestibule.

"Methinks the Constable is like a wild beast about to fall into a trap," remarked Triboulet to the astrologer. "Were I the king, if I once caught him, I would not let him go."

"Neither would I," replied Agrippa, significantly. "But his majesty cannot read the future."

By this time Bourbon had dismounted from his charger, and was received with the ceremony due to his exalted rank by the chamberlain, who descended the stairs to meet him. Pages, esquires, and gentlemen bowed as the haughty Constable mounted the steps, and when he reached the summit the Marshal de Montmorency advanced to meet him, and a very cordial greeting passed between them.

"I am right glad to see you here again, prince," said the marshal. "I hope we shall soon gather fresh laurels together in the Milanese."

"I should rejoice to fight by your side," replied Bourbon. "But I know not why I have been sent for by the king."

"Have you been sent for?" said Montmorency, surprised. "I thought you came of your own accord. So much the better. You will be well received. The king is in a very gracious humour — and so is the duchess."

"Ah! the duchess!" exclaimed Bourbon, with an expression of deep disgust.

"You do not speak of her highness as she speaks of you, prince," observed Triboulet. "I have heard her sigh and seen her change colour at the mention of your name."

Bourbon made no reply to this remark, but graciously returned the salutation addressed to him

by Cornelius Agrippa. A slight sign from the astrologer, who was standing within the vestibule, drew him towards him.

"I would fain have a word with your highness," said Agrippa, as the Constable approached him. "I have been consulting your horoscope."

"Ha! what have you found therein, good doctor?" asked Bourbon, who was by no means free from superstition.

"Much," replied Agrippa, gravely. "This is a critical hour with you, prince — the most critical hour of your existence, since it forms the turning-point of your career. According as you now act, so will your future destiny be influenced. Comply with certain propositions which will be made you, and which will in no respect affect your honour, and your position will be assured, and you will be elevated to almost supreme power. Decline them —"

"What then?" demanded Bourbon, fixing his dark eyes searchingly upon the astrologer.

"Decline them, I repeat," pursued Agrippa, "and you will incur great perils — very great perils — but you will baffle the schemes of your enemies, and obtain brilliant successes."

"You promise this, doctor?" cried Bourbon, eagerly.

"The stars promise it you, prince, not I," returned Agrippa. "But I have more to tell, if you have courage to hear it," he added, gravely.

"Say on! — let me know all," cried Bourbon.

"You will not long enjoy your triumph. You will meet a warrior's death before the walls of a great city."

"The very death I covet," said the Constable. "Take this, doctor," he added, detaching a gem from his doublet, and giving it him. "Your prognostication decides me."

"A word more and I have done," said Agrippa, lowering his tone. "You will gain friends as powerful as those you will lose. There are other monarchs who can better appreciate your noble qualities than the King of France."

Bourbon looked at the astrologer, as if he would fain question him further, but the latter signified by a glance that he had nothing more to impart, and the Constable left him and followed the chamberlain, who led him across the vestibule towards the doors of the grand gallery, before which ushers and a guard of halberdiers were stationed.

II.

François I.

The magnificent gallery which we are now about to enter had only just been completed, and formed the principal ornament of the palace, though it was subsequently eclipsed by another and yet more magnificent gallery reared by Henri II. The gallery of François I., which still exists, though reft of some of its ancient splendour, was of great length, admirably proportioned, and possessed a superb plafond, painted by the best Italian masters, and supported by a grand gilt cornice. The walls were adorned with colossal figures of goddesses and nymphs carved in oak, and between these statues were introduced admirable paintings. On either side were lofty windows with deep embrasures, embellished like the walls with carvings and paintings. The windows on the left looked on an exquisite orange-garden, while those on the right commanded a spacious court, with a fountain, a chef-d'œuvre of art, in the midst of it.

At the upper end of the grand gallery a brilliant party was now assembled. Chief among them, not merely in point of rank, but for his lofty stature,

majestic and graceful deportment, and splendid habiliments, was François I. At this period, the king, who was still under thirty, was in the full éclat of his manly beauty. So lofty was his stature, that he towered above the tallest of his courtiers, and his person was strongly but admirably proportioned. With his remarkable physiognomy, rendered familiar by the breathing portrait of Titian, all are acquainted. All can conjure up that countenance, so handsome, intellectual, refined, haughty, sarcastic, of which perhaps the sole fault was that the principal feature was too prominent — a peculiarity which caused the monarch to be popularly surnamed *François le grand nez.* The king's eyes were dark and full of fire, and his clear skin was set off by a pointed beard. His brown locks were cut short, in consequence of a severe wound he had received on the head, and as a matter of course the fashion had been followed by his courtiers. His teeth were magnificent, and were constantly displayed, his countenance being rarely without a smile. His expression was jovial and good humoured, though somewhat proud and sarcastic; his deportment full of majesty, but he was so affable that he set all who approached him at ease. Familiarity, however, was never attempted with François, even by his greatest favourites. In a word, he fully merited the appella-

tion to which he aspired, and which was universally bestowed upon him, of the First Gentleman in Europe.

François I. was not remarkable merely for his personal accomplishments and graces. His mental qualifications were of a very high order. If not erudite or profound, he was well read. He was fond of poetry, and was himself a poet. He delighted in romances of chivalry, "Lancelot du Lac," "Garin le Lorrain," and took for his model the peerless "Amadis de Gaule." In consequence of his predilection for them, the favourite books with the gallants and dames of his court were "Gérard de Nevers," "Pierre de Provence et la Belle Magueloune," and "Petit Jehan de Saintré." Not merely was François I. a lover of literature, and a patron of poets and men of learning, but he warmly encouraged the arts, and his court was frequented by the best painters, sculptors, and architects, whom he brought from Italy.

Endowed with some of the highest and noblest qualities, by nature frank, loyal, and chivalrous, though fiery and impetuous, passionately fond of war, and always thirsting for military renown, François was a perfect type of the nation over which he ruled, and next to Henri IV., who to a certain extent based himself upon him, is the best loved of

the French monarchs. His splendid person and noble features, his kingly deportment, his accomplishments, his martial tastes, his courage, his address in the tilt-yard and in the management of arms of all kinds, pike, rapier, two-handed sword, his unequalled skill and grace in horsemanship, his jovial humour, his bonhomie, his devotion to the fair sex, are dwelt upon with satisfaction, and his faults overlooked or forgotten. The following poetical portrait of him is far too brightly coloured:

> C'est luy qui a grâce et parler de maître,
> Digne d'avoir sur tous droit et puissance,
> Qui sans nommer, se peut assez connoître.
> C'est luy qui a de tout la connaisance.
> De sa beauté il est blanc et vermeil,
> Les cheveux bruns, de grande et belle taille;
> En terre il est comme au ciel le soleil.
> Hardi, vaillant, sage et preux en bataille,
> Il est benin, doux, humble en sa grandeur,
> Fort est puissant, et plain de patience.

The faults of François I. were profligacy and prodigality. More than once he exhausted his treasury by the immense sums he lavished upon his mistresses and his favourites. So completely did he yield to his love of pleasure, that the greater part of his life which was not occupied in the field was spent in sybaritic enjoyments. Though not tyrannical, he was capricious and vindictive, and not un-

frequently strained the royal prerogative to the utmost.

On this occasion the splendid person of the king was displayed to the utmost advantage by his magnificent attire. His habiliments were of white and blue — the colours of the Comtesse de Châteaubriand. His doublet, of azure velvet slashed and puffed with white silk, glittered with diamonds, and his girdle was ornamented with rubies and emeralds. Over his doublet he wore a white brocade mantle, trimmed with minever, and so fashioned as to display the puffed sleeves of his jerkin. The handle and sheath of his poniard were studded with gems, as was also the guard of his long rapier. His sky-blue velvet toque was encircled by a white plume, and ornamented by diamonds. The perfect symmetry of his lower limbs was displayed by his white silk hose, and below the knee he wore the Garter, with which he had been invested by Henry VIII. prior to their meeting at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. His buskins, of blue velvet slashed with white satin, like his doublet, were ornamented with pearls. He was vain of his small feet and finely-formed hands, and his fingers were loaded with magnificent rings. Around his neck he wore the collar of the order of Saint Michael.

The court of François I., as we have intimated,

was not only attended by the first nobles, but by the most beautiful women of the kingdom, and, though distinguished more than any other of the period for splendour, refinement, and chivalry, was not remarkable for strictness and decorum, though the fair fame of his neglected consort, Queen Claude, was never impeached. But this devout and discreet princess was queen only in name. The hands that really held the reins of government were those of the Duchess d'Angoulême, while the king's affections were estranged by his mistresses.

The Comtesse de Châteaubriand, who at this time held absolute sway over the fickle heart of the amorous monarch, was in sooth a most lovely and fascinating creature. Francoise de Foix, daughter of Jean de Foix, Vicomte de Lautrec, and first cousin of the heroic Gaston de Foix, surnamed "*le Foudre d'Italie*," was early united to the Comte Laval de Châteaubriand, whose jealousy of her beauty induced him to immure her in a solitary château in Brittany. His precautions, however, were unavailing. François having heard of the incomparable charms of the countess, compelled her jealous spouse to bring her to court, and at once became passionately enamoured of her. The nature of Françoise de Foix was unambitious, and she

might not have exercised the influence she possessed over the king beneficially but for her brothers, the elder of whom, Odet de Foix, Seigneur de Lautrec — a brave but not a successful leader — she made a marshal of France; while the Comte de Lesparre, the younger, also owed his advancement to her.

Françoise de Foix was tall, slender, and exquisitely proportioned. Her features were of extreme delicacy, her eyes large and of a tender blue, her eyebrows beautifully pencilled, her locks blonde, and her complexion ravishingly fair. Her attire was of white brocade, her long stomacher being covered with gems, while the girdle that encircled her narrow waist was studded with precious stones. Over her gown she wore a surcoat of azure satin embroidered with gold, and having loose hanging sleeves. A magnificent head-dress of goldsmith's work confined her blonde tresses, and set off her lovely countenance. Françoise de Foix was as fascinating in manner as she was charming in person, and her royal lover seemed spell-bound by her attractions. She was not, however, more faithful to him than she had been to her husband, but she had the art to conceal her infidelities, and never incurred his suspicions. Unable to brook his dishonour, the Comte de Châteaubriand had with-

drawn wholly from court, and secluded himself in his lonely château in Brittany, where he meditated a terrible revenge, which he afterwards consummated. The end of the lovely countess was very tragical.

From the contemplation of the bewitching Françoise de Foix we must turn to another lovely woman, who formed part of the assemblage in the gallery. This was the king's sister, Marguerite de Valois, Duchess d'Alençon — La Marguerite des Marguerites, as she was styled by her royal brother, who tenderly loved her. Graceful of person, beautiful of feature, amiable in disposition, a model of virtue in a depraved court, united to a husband she could not respect, and who was incapable of appreciating her merits, yet to whom she was faithful, highly accomplished, learned, and witty, the Duchess d'Alençon was the chief ornament of the court of François I.

About two years subsequent to the period of our history Marguerite was liberated from her husband by death, and espoused in her second nuptials Henri d'Albret, King of Navarre — a consort in all respects better suited to her. As Queen of Navarre, her court was thronged by poets, savants, and men of letters. Clement Marot thus eulogizes her:

Entre autres dons de grâces immortelles,
Madame écrit si haut et doucement,
Que je m'étonne, en voyant choses telles,
Qu'on n'en reçoit plus d'ébahissement.
Puis quand je l'ouis parler si sagement,
Et que je vois sa plume travailler,
Je tourne bride, et m'ébahis comment
On est si sot de s'en émerveiller.

Ronsard, then a handsome page, thus addresses her:

Ainsi tu fus, ô princesse,
Ançois plutôt, ô déesse,
Tu fus certes tout l'honneur
Des princesses de notre âge,
Soit en force de courage,
Ou soit en royal bonheur.

By some she was styled the Tenth Muse and the Fourth Grace. Her *Nouvelles*, which obtained a wonderful celebrity in her own day, may be classed with the *Decameron* of Boccaccio.

Marguerite was dressed in crimson velvet, richly embroidered, and her head-dress was of goldsmith's work, like that of the Comtesse de Châteaubriand. If she was not so fascinating as the latter syren, she possessed infinitely more dignity, and her features had an expression which nothing but purity can impart.

Many other beautiful and high-born dames and demoiselles were present, but we do not think it

necessary to describe them, neither can we do more than allude to the brilliant collection of young seigneurs, all magnificently arrayed, by whom the king was attended.

"So you are resolved to go to Italy, sire," observed the Comtesse de Châteaubriand to the king, who was standing near an open window, gazing into the orange-garden. "Nothing that I can say will detain you."

"I must win back the duchy of Milan, which your brother, the Maréchal de Lautrec, has suffered Prospero Colonna and Pescara to wrest from me," rejoined François. "Had I been there, this would not have happened. I have been idle far too long, and must conduct the war in person."

"I trust it will be a brief campaign," sighed the countess.

"Doubt it not, ma mie," replied the king. "The duchy shall soon again be mine. During the winter I will hold my court at Milan, and you shall come thither, if you list."

"I would I might accompany you during the campaign, sire! Let me go with you, I entreat you!"

"No, that cannot be. You could not cross the Alps with the army. But you shall follow speedily.

Nay, content you, mignonne. You shall go with me as far as Lyons."

At this moment, Bonnivet, who had come quickly down the gallery, approached them.

"You have some news for us?" said the king, looking inquiringly at him. "Any tidings from Bayonne, or from the Milanese?"

"None, sire," replied the Admiral. "I merely come to announce to you a most unexpected visitor. Not to keep you a moment in suspense, I will add that the Prince Mal-endurant has just arrived at the palace."

"The Constable de Bourbon arrived here!" exclaimed the countess.

"His arrival is not unexpected," replied the king, smiling. "In fact, I sent for him."

"You sent for him, sire!" exclaimed Bonnivet, surprised, and exchanging a glance with the countess. "I did not suppose you would adopt such a course. If I had been aware of it, I would have counselled you against it."

"And so would I," added the countess.

"For that very reason, I did not mention my design," remarked François. "What will you say, ma mie, if I should be reconciled to the Constable?" he added to the countess.

"I shall say that your Majesty is not true

to yourself," she replied, unable to conceal her vexation.

"Reconciliation with Bourbon is impossible, unless the Duchess d'Angoulême will forego her claim — and she will never do that!" cried Bonnivet.

"Hum!" exclaimed François. "One cannot tell what may happen. I always pay the greatest deference to my mother's wishes, and, as she has expressed a desire to see the Constable, I have sent for him."

"It is strange I should hear nothing of this before, sire," remarked François de Foix, in a tone of pique.

"Not so strange as you think, mignonne," replied the king. "The duchess bound me to secrecy."

"What can be the meaning of this?" thought Bonnivet. "The duchess hates Bourbon too deeply to make terms with him."

"I see it!" mentally ejaculated the countess, instinctively arriving at the truth. "Her love for Bourbon has been suddenly revived. But will he accept her terms? If I know him, he will not."

"Here comes the Constable," remarked François, as the tall and majestic figure of Bourbon was seen moving slowly down the gallery. He was preceded by the chamberlain, and followed by Saint-Vallier and René de Bretagne.

"He has not lost his insolent deportment," remarked the Admiral. "I ought to have informed your majesty that he has brought with him an escort of three hundred gentlemen."

The observations told, and a frown of displeasure passed over the king's brow. But it fled before Bourbon came up, and gave way to a gracious smile.

"Welcome, cousin," he cried, in a voice that bespoke cordiality. "I am right glad to see you again at Fontainebleau."

At the same time he advanced towards the Constable, and embraced him affectionately.

"Sire, your kindness overwhelms me," said Bourbon, moved by the warmth of the reception.

"You have been absent from court far too long, cousin — far too long," pursued the king. "Our sister the Duchess d'Alençon, and the Comtesse de Châteaubriand, will tell you how much we have missed you."

"It is not my fault that I have been absent, sire," replied Bourbon. "Your majesty will own that I had good reasons for keeping away."

"I wish you had come, notwithstanding, cousin," rejoined François. "A few words of personal explanation would have helped to set matters right. But you shall not depart till we have settled our differences."

"Then I must tarry long, sire," observed Bourbon, smiling sternly. "Your majesty, I hear, has been pleased to style me le Prince Mal-endurant, and I own that the appellation is merited, but I am not altogether as patient as you imagine."

"I do not wonder at it, cousin. Heaven knows, you have had good cause for anger! And if you have exhibited a patience worthy of the long-enduring patriarch himself, I admire you the more for it. But if I inflict injuries, I know how to repair them, and your wrongs shall be redressed."

"You own I have been wronged, sire?" exclaimed Bourbon. "That is something."

"Foi de gentilhomme! I will make you amends, cousin," cried the king. "You shall be abundantly satisfied."

Bourbon's sternness could not fail to give way before these and many other equally gracious expressions. It was evident that François desired to conciliate his offended visitor, and as he employed his irresistible fascination of manner to that end, he succeeded. The king next addressed himself to Saint-Vallier and René de Bretagne, greeting them both with marked condescension and kindness, and, while he was thus engaged, Bourbon paid his devoirs to the Duchess d'Alençon and the Comtesse de Châteaubriand. By the latter he was coldly

received, but Marguerite de Valois accorded him a welcome as gracious as that of her royal brother. A haughty salutation passed between the Constable and Bonnivet.

"I must have a few words with you in private, cousin," said the king, turning to Bourbon, as soon as he had concluded his brief discourse with Saint-Vallier. "Come with me, I pray you."

The Constable bowed, and he and the king quitted the gallery, and entering a corridor on the left, proceeded to a suite of magnificent apartments which François himself had recently constructed. The most friendly understanding seemed already re-established between them. François treated the Constable like a brother, and placed his arm affectionately upon his shoulder.

"I will now avow the truth to you, cousin," he said. "This process has been a great pain to me, but there is only one way of settling it. Methinks you can readily guess that mode."

"No, sire, I confess I am completely puzzled," replied Bourbon.

"You are duller than I thought," said the king. "The matter rests with the Duchess d'Angoulême. You must talk it over with her."

"With the duchess, sire!" exclaimed Bourbon. "Impossible! You must hold me excused."

"Nay, I insist, cousin," rejoined François.

"The interview will be productive of no good, sire, and will rather aggravate existing difficulties. Again, I pray you to excuse me."

"Nay, I am resolved, cousin. I know what is for your good. Come with me to my mother's private cabinet. She expects you."

"Expects me!" cried Bourbon. "Then this is a preconcerted scheme. I warn your majesty it will fail."

"I will listen to no more objections," said François. "You will thank me for my firmness anon."

III.

Louise de Savoie.

BOURBON yielded with an ill grace, and entered an ante-chamber with the king, in which several gentlemen and pages were assembled. Two ushers were stationed at a door at the farther end of the chamber. At the king's approach this door was thrown open, and Bourbon found himself in the presence of the person he most hated on earth.

The Duchess d'Angoulême was seated at a table, engaged in converse with the Chancellor Duprat, who arose on the king's entrance with Bourbon, and made a profound obeisance, but the duchess retained her seat.

Though at this time Louise de Savoie was nearer fifty than forty, she had by no means lost her personal attractions. She bestowed great care in the preservation of her charms, and Nature seconded her efforts. Careful, temperate, active, both in mind and body, ill health had produced no ravages upon her frame, and at forty-five — nay, even at forty-seven, which was her exact age when Bourbon appeared before her — the duchess looked younger than many an indolent beauty of thirty-five. Her complexion was fresh and blooming, her cheek

rounded and full, her eyes bright, her brow white as marble and with scarcely a wrinkle, and her dark tresses entirely untinged with grey. In brief, she was still so handsome that it was supposed she must have discovered some wondrous potion for the preservation of her youth. Her figure was tall, and admirably proportioned, with a slight tendency to embonpoint, which she successfully combated by exercise and abstemiousness. It was from the duchess that François and Marguerite inherited their symmetry of form and beauty of feature. Her hands were small, white, soft, and dimpled, and her long taper fingers were covered with rings. Her deportment was majestic, and at times imperious. She did not neglect to heighten the effect of her charms and imposing appearance by richness of attire. On this occasion she was arrayed in purple cloth of gold tissue, her stomacher being embroidered all over with flat gold and damask. Her sleeves were paned with gold and quilted, and fastened with gold aiglets. She wore a partlet ornamented with rubies and other precious stones; her head-dress, diamond-shaped and having long side lappets, glittered with gems. From her neck hung a chain of gold, enamelled black, sustaining a magnificent diamond cross, and her girdle was ornamented with diamonds, rubies, and pearls.'

Over the king her son, as we have said, Louise de Savoie had early obtained an extraordinary ascendancy, which she never lost. He appointed her Regent of the kingdom when he set out on his first Italian campaign, and had resolved to entrust the government again to her care during the war which he now meditated for the repossession of the Milanese.

Ambitious of power, the Duchess d'Angoulême was also greedy and avaricious, and scrupled not to enrich herself from the royal treasures. Of a miserly disposition, she amassed money, not to spend, but hoard it, and she died possessed of enormous wealth.

Louise was the daughter of Philippe, Duke de Savoie, and Marguerite de Bourbon, and was wedded at the age of twelve to Charles d'Orléans, Comte d'Angoulême. Six years later she became a widow.

Bourbon's swarthy cheek flushed, and the blood mounted to his brow, as he stood before the duchess. Bowing haughtily, he remained at a little distance from her.

Approaching his mother, the king said, in his cheerful accents,

"I have brought back the truant chevalier, madame."

Adding a few words in a low tone, he turned to Bourbon, and telling him he would return anon, quitted the chamber with Duprat.

Left alone with the Constable, Louise regarded him anxiously and tenderly, but the stern expression of Bourbon's features underwent no change. The duchess, however, would not be discouraged, but said, in a gentle voice which she thought calculated to move him,

"Dismiss that frown, Charles de Bourbon, and come and sit nigh me. Nay," she added, playfully, "I will be obeyed."

But Bourbon moved not, and his brow grew yet more sombre.

Presently she arose, and, stepping up to him, laid her hand gently upon his arm.

He shrank from her touch as if a viper had stung him.

Mastering her anger by a great effort, she said,

"Come, let us be friends, Charles de Bourbon. We have been enemies long enough."

"Friends, madame!" exclaimed Bourbon, bitterly. "You can scarcely expect it."

"But you will forgive me, Charles, will you not, when I tell you I still love you?" she rejoined.

"You are too old for love, madame — far too old," he rejoined, with a look almost of loathing.

"You may have loved me years ago, though your conduct since would lead me to doubt it. But now the feeling ought to be — must be — a stranger to your breast."

"My love for you is strong as ever, and enables me even to bear this language from you," she said. "Hear my explanation before you reproach me so severely."

"I have not reproached you, madame, but I say that your declarations are utterly inconsistent with your conduct. You have pursued me with unceasing animosity. By your instrumentality, madame — for I well know you were the cause of my removal — I was despoiled of my authority in the Milanese, which I had helped to win, and the government given to Lautrec, by whose mismanagement the fruits of the battle of Marignan were lost. Not only did you prevent the reimbursement of the large sums I had expended for the king's use in Italy, but you withheld the payment of my pensions as grand-chamberlain of France, as governor of Languedoc, and as Constable. I deserved better treatment from the king, but I knew from whom the wrongs proceeded, and made no complaint. This was not enough. By your instigation a deeper affront was offered me. I will not vaunt my military skill, though I had proved it sufficiently at Marignan, but I was excluded by you

— by you, madame, for you directed the king — from the four grand military commanderships formed by his majesty, and given by him to the Duke d'Alençon, the Duke de Vendôme, Bonnivet, and Lautrec. Still I was patient."

"Why were you patient, Charles? Why did you not complain to me?" cried the duchess.

"Though deeply mortified by the affront," pursued Bourbon, disregarding the question, "I did not hesitate to obey the king's commands to join the army of Picardy, and brought with me six thousand well-armed fantassins, and three hundred lances. How was I requited? I need not tell you, madame, since the work was yours, that the command of the vanguard, which was mine by right, was given to the incapable D'Alençon. That affront was hard to bear, yet I *did* bear it. Well might the king call me the Prince Mal-endurant!"

"Again I ask you, Charles, why did you not appeal to me?" said the duchess.

"Appeal to you, madame — to the author of my wrongs!" rejoined the Constable, fiercely. "I would have died rather than so humiliate myself. Though profoundly wounded, I remained loyal in heart to the king. No act, no word evinced resentment. But, instead of disarming your animosity, my patience only aggravated it. You had not wreaked your ven-

geance sufficiently upon me. Disgrace was not enough. I must endure spoliation. You threw off the mask and assailed me in person. In concert with your unscrupulous adviser, Duprat, you contrived a diabolical plan to deprive me of the whole of my possessions. An infamous process was commenced against me, which has filled all France — all Europe — with astonishment. The finishing stroke has only to be put to your work. My property has been sequestrated by the Parliament, and may be confiscated. But beware, madame!" he added, in a voice of terrible menace. "Beware! A fearful retribution will follow."

"Threaten me not, Charles de Bourbon," she rejoined. "But listen. I do not deny the charges you have brought against me. Had you submitted to the first blow — had you sued for grace — all the rest would have been spared you."

"Sue for grace, madame! Sue for grace to you!" cried the Constable. "You know little of Charles de Bourbon if you think he would so demean himself."

"Hear me out," said the duchess. "I was determined to conquer your pride — to bring you to my feet — but you compelled me, by your inflexibility, to have recourse to harsher measures than I originally intended. You have to thank yourself, Charles,

for the punishment you have endured. But throughout it all, I have suffered more than you — far more."

"I am glad to hear it," remarked Bourbon. "But I doubt it."

"When I have seemed to hate you most, I have loved you best, Charles. My heart was torn by conflicting emotions — rage, grief, love. You had spurned my love, and few women could pardon such an affront. But I could forgive it, and would have forgiven you, if you had returned to me. But you ever held aloof. You forced me to go on. Blow after blow was dealt, in the hope that each might be the last. Oh, how it would have joyed me to restore you to the government of the Milanese! — to have ordered the payment of your pensions! — to have given you the command of the army of Picardy! But all can now be set right."

"Impossible, madame," rejoined Bourbon.

"Say not so, Charles. Since you have been made aware of my motives, you must view my conduct in a different light. Let the past be forgotten. Let all animosity be at an end between us. Henceforth, let us be friends — nay, more than friends. Do you not understand me, Charles?"

"I would fain not do so, madame," rejoined Bourbon, averting his gaze from her.

"Let not resentment blind you to your own interests, Charles," pursued the duchess. "You have felt my power to injure you. Henceforth, you shall find how well I can serve you. I can restore all you have lost — honours, commands, pensions. Nay, I can raise you higher than you have ever risen, and load you with wealth beyond your conception. All this I can do — and will do. Kneel down at my feet, Charles — not to supplicate my pardon, for that you have — but to renew those protestations of love which you once offered me. Kneel, I conjure you."

But Bourbon remained inflexible.

"My knees would refuse their office were I inclined to comply," he said.

"Then I must perforce take on myself the part which of right belongs to you, Charles. By the death of your spouse, Suzanne de Bourbon, you are free to wed again. I offer you my hand. You ought to solicit it on your bended knee — but no matter! — I offer it to you."

"Is the king aware of your design, madame? Does he approve of the step?" demanded Bourbon.

"The king sent for you at my instance to arrange the marriage," rejoined the duchess.

"His majesty's complaisance is carried to the extremest point," said Bourbon. "But he seems to

have taken my assent for granted — as you have done, madame."

"We could not doubt it," said the duchess, smiling confidently. "The proposed union offers you too many advantages to be rejected."

"Enumerate them, I pray you?" said Bourbon.

"First, then, the marriage will amicably settle the process between us, and will operate like a decree in your favour, for you will retain your possessions. Next, I shall bring you a royal dowry. As my husband, you will be second only in authority to the king. Nay, you will have greater power than he. You will find Louise de Savoie a very different wife from Suzanne de Bourbon. I will enrich you — I will augment your power — I will aggrandise you. You shall be king — all but in name."

"I doubt not your power to accomplish all this, madame," rejoined Bourbon. "I know your unbounded influence over your son. I know you have filled your coffers from the royal treasures — as was proved by the confession of the wretched Semblençay, who gave you the five million ducats he ought to have sent to Italy, and who paid the penalty of his folly with his life. I know that in effect you have already despoiled me of my possessions ——"

"Dwell on these matters no longer, Charles," she interrupted. "Forget the past, and look forward to a brilliant future. My offer is accepted? — — speak!"

"You deem me so much abased that I must needs accept it, madame," said Bourbon. "But I am not yet fallen so low. I reject it — scornfully reject it."

"Reflect, Charles — reflect before you come to this fatal determination, for fatal it will be to you," she cried. "You are ruined — irretrievably ruined — if you wed me not."

"I would sooner be degraded from my rank — I would sooner mount the scaffold, than wed you, Louise de Savoie, my some time mistress, but now my bitter enemy," said the Constable, fiercely.

"Bourbon, I swear to you I am not your enemy," cried the duchess. "Do not regard me with scorn and hate. Look at me as a loving woman. My heart — my soul is yours. Since you will not stoop to me, I will do what I never yet did to man — I will kneel to you."

And she threw herself before him, and clasped his hands.

"Forgive me, Charles!" she cried, in half suffocated accents. "Forgive me for the great love I have ever borne you."

Notwithstanding the supplications and tears of the duchess, there was no symptom of yielding in Bourbon. With almost rudeness, he said,

"Arise, madame. It is useless to prolong this interview. Farewell!"

"Stay, I command you, Charles de Bourbon," she said, rousing all her dignity. "For a moment I had forgotten myself, but your barbarous conduct has restored me. Henceforward I will banish your image from my breast, or only retain it there to animate my vengeance. Your possessions shall be at once confiscated. I will make you a beggar, and then see if you can find a wife among the meanest of my court dames."

"I shall not need to do so, madame," rejoined Bourbon, sternly. "Let it confound you to learn that the Emperor Charles V. has offered me in marriage his sister Leanor, widow of the late King of Portugal."

"The Emperor has offered you his sister?" exclaimed the duchess. "It is false — it is false!"

"You will find it true, madame," said Bourbon, with a contemptuous smile.

"You shall never wed her," cried the duchess. "If you reject me, you shall wed no one else."

"These threats are idle, madame," rejoined Bourbon, scornfully. "I laugh at your impotent

malice. You have wreaked your vengeance to the utmost. But you will never be able to subdue me to your will."

"Traitor and villain, I see through your designs!" cried the duchess. "You meditate reprisals through the enemies of your country. But I will effectually crush you. If your treasonable practices be proved, I will have your head — ay, your head, Charles de Bourbon."

"I have no fear for my head," laughed Bourbon, disdainfully. "It is safe enough, even though I am in the king's palace at Fontainebleau."

"A moment, Charles!" cried the duchess, suddenly relapsing into tenderness, and making an effort to detain him. "Are we to part thus?"

"How otherwise should we separate, madame, than with threats on your part — defiance on mine?" said Bourbon.

And with a haughty inclination he was about to depart, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and the king, unannounced, entered the cabinet.

IV.

What passed between the King and Bourbon.

Evidently, François had expected a very different termination to the interview from that which had occurred. The smile fled from his countenance as he gazed at the pair.

"I have found him utterly impracticable," whispered the duchess. "But you may have better success."

"We shall see," replied the king, in the same tone. "Leave us alone together."

Casting a look at Bourbon, who haughtily averted his gaze from her, the duchess stepped towards the back of the cabinet and raised the hangings, behind which was a door communicating with her private apartments. Instead of passing through the door, however, she concealed herself behind the arras.

"Come, cousin," said François, approaching the Constable, and leaning good humouredly on his shoulder. "Cast off those moody looks. Have you quarrelled with my mother? If so, I will engage to set the matter right."

"I pray your majesty to let me go," rejoined

Bourbon. "I am scarce master of myself, and may offend you."

"No, you will not do that," replied the king. "I have more command of my temper than you have; and besides, I can make allowances for you. But you must not let your pride interfere with your interests."

"The duchess has told me so already, sire," cried Bourbon, impatiently. "I know what you design to say to me. I know the arguments you would employ. But the match cannot be brought about."

"Answer one question," said the king. "Is it nothing to be father-in-law to the King of France?"

"I am sensible enough of the distinction such an alliance would confer upon me, sire," replied the Constable. "But, for all that, I must decline it."

"Foi de gentilhomme! fair cousin, you are perverse enough to provoke me, but I will be calm," said the king, changing his attitude and tone. "Since argument is useless, I must exert my authority. By Saint Denis! the match *shall* take place. I will have no 'nay' from you. Now you understand."

"I hear what you say, sire," rejoined Bourbon, sternly. "But you cannot enforce compliance with the injunction. Not even at your bidding will I wed the Duchess d'Angoulême."

"You refuse!—ha?" demanded the king, fiercely.

"Absolutely," replied Bourbon. "I am a prince of the blood."

"What of that?" cried François, yet more highly incensed. "Were you a crowned king, you would not bemean yourself by marriage with my mother. It is she who degrades herself by stooping to you. But this," he added, checking himself, "cannot be your motive."

"No, sire, it is *not* my motive," rejoined Bourbon. "Since you force me to speak, you shall have the truth. I prefer death to dishonour."

"Dishonour!" echoed the king, astounded and enraged. "Dare you breathe such a word in connexion with my mother? What mean you? Speak!"

François looked at him with eyes that seemed to flash lightning. Bourbon, however, did not quail before the fierce looks and gestures of the king, but replied with stern significance:

"A man of my quality, sire, does not marry a wanton."

"Sang Dieu! this to me!" cried the king, transported with rage.

And he struck Bourbon in the face with his hand.

This mortal insult, as may be imagined, produced a fearful effect on the Constable. His first impulse was to slay his assailant, and his hand in-

voluntarily clutched his sword. But he abandoned the insane design almost as soon as formed. In the effort to constrain himself, his frame and features were terribly convulsed, and a cry of rage that was scarcely human escaped him. The king watched him narrowly, prepared for attack, but manifesting no alarm.

"Sire," cried Bourbon, at length, "that was a craven blow, unworthy of one who aspires to be the first knight in Christendom. No other person but yourself, who had thus insulted me, should live. But you are safe. You have dishonoured me for ever. Take back the dignity you have bestowed upon me, and which I am unworthy longer to wear," he added, tearing the jewelled cross of Saint Michael from his breast, and casting it on the ground. "Others may fight for you. My sword shall never again be drawn in your service."

With a heart bursting with rage and grief, he rushed out of the room.

As Bourbon disappeared, the duchess came from behind the hangings.

"So, you have heard what has passed between us, madame?" cried the king.

"I have," she replied. "He is a false traitor and a liar, and has been rightly served. But you will not let him quit the palace? By that blow, which he richly deserved, you have made him your

mortal enemy. You have him now in your hands, and you will rue it, if you suffer him to escape. He has many partisans, and may raise a revolt."

"You alarm yourself unnecessarily, madame," rejoined François.

"I have good reason for apprehension," rejoined the duchess. "He has already entered into secret negotiations with the Emperor."

"Foi de gentilhomme! if I thought so, I would order his instant arrest!" exclaimed the king. "But are you sure, madame? Have you any proof of what you assert?"

"He boasted just now that the Emperor had offered him the widowed Queen of Portugal in marriage," replied the duchess. "Does not that prove that secret overtures have been made him?"

"You are right. He is more dangerous than I thought. I must prevent his defection — by fair means if possible — if not ——"

"You have provoked him too far, my son," interrupted the duchess. "He will never forgive the insult you have put upon him. Allow him to depart, and most assuredly he will league with your enemies."

At this moment Bonnivet entered the cabinet.

"Pardon me, sire, and you, gracious madame, if I venture to interrupt you," he said. "But I would

know your majesty's commands in regard to the Constable. His demeanour and looks are so infuriated, and his language so full of menace, that I have ordered the guard not to let him quit the palace."

"You have done well, monseigneur," said the duchess. "Where is he now?"

"In the pavillon de Saint Louis," remarked Bonnivet, "with her majesty and the Dame de Beaujeu."

"I did not know the duchess was here," remarked Louise de Savoie, uneasily.

"She only arrived an hour ago from Paris," replied Bonnivet. "Ha! what is this I see?" he added, noticing the cross of Saint Michael, which Bourbon had cast on the ground. "Is it thus your honours are treated, sire? Such insolence deserves severe punishment."

"I would punish the offender — severely punish him — but that I gave him great provocation," returned the king. "You say that the Constable is in the salle de Saint Louis, with the queen and the Dame de Beaujeu?"

"He went thither not many minutes ago," replied Bonnivet. "Shall I arrest him as he comes forth?"

"No," said the king. "I will see him again, and then decide. Come with me, madame — and you too, Admiral."

V.

The Dame de Beaujeu.

Prevented by the guard from quitting the palace, and nothing doubting that his arrest would speedily follow, Bourbon was slowly pacing the corridor, considering what course he should pursue, when an usher approached him, and, bowing reverently, informed him that the queen desired to speak with him.

The Constable willingly obeyed the summons, and was conducted to a magnificent hall, where he found the queen.

Her majesty was seated in a fauteuil, and beside her was an ancient dame of very striking appearance. Several court demoiselles and pages were in attendance, but they were stationed at the farther end of the hall.

The amiable qualities of Queen Claude were written in legible characters in her countenance. She was still young, and her features, though not beautiful, were pleasing. Her person was slightly deformed. It is quite clear she must have suffered deeply in secret, but profound as they were, her

sorrows were breathed only to the ear of her confessor, or to Heaven. Her manner was singularly gentle, almost humble, and she rarely, if ever, manifested resentment against those who most deeply injured her. So saintly, indeed, was her conduct, that when she was released from her troubles, an event which occurred within a year from the date of our history, miracles were supposed to have been wrought upon her tomb. Claude, we need scarcely add, was the eldest daughter of Louis XII. and Anne of Brittany. Married to François, then Duke de Valois, when she was barely fifteen, she brought him as a dowry Brittany, and the title to the duchy of Milan. On the present occasion she was attired in cloth of gold tissue, raised with pearls of damask silver, and was coiffed in a diamond-shaped head-dress, ornamented with jewels.

The ancient dame whom we have mentioned as seated near her was Anne of France, Duchess de Bourbon-Beaujeu, eldest daughter of Louis XI. A woman of masculine character and understanding, the Dame de Beaujeu, as she was called, possessed many of her sagacious father's qualities, great shrewdness and tenacity of purpose. She had governed the kingdom with firmness and ability during the youth of her brother, Charles VIII., and long maintained her sway, but her credit declined

under Louis XII., and when François I. mounted the throne the power she had once possessed fell entirely into the hands of the Duchess d'Angoulême.

At no time had Anne de France been handsome, and perhaps her features were more agreeable in old age than in youth. Her countenance was hard, strongly marked, and entirely devoid of feminine expression. Always meagre of person, she became thinner and more rigid as she advanced in life. Her manner was cold and severe, but her deportment did not lack dignity.

At the time when we discover her, the Dame de Beaujeu seemed utterly prostrated by illness. Her features were wasted and haggard, and all her movements evinced extreme debility. She was attired in black velvet, richly trimmed with sable. Around her throat she wore a gorget, and her venerable locks were partially concealed by a black velvet hood. She had been brought in a litter to the palace, and had to be carried up to the salle de Saint Louis. Her physician, Mathieu Bernard, accompanied her, and was now standing at a little distance, describing her precarious condition to Cornelius Agrippa.

"Is it possible her grace can have journeyed hither from Paris, doctor?" inquired Agrippa.

"She heard that the Constable de Bourbon had

been summoned to Fontainebleau by the king, and insisted upon coming hither," replied Mathieu Bernard. "All my efforts to dissuade her grace were vain."

"She will scarce get back again," replied Agrippa.

Making a profound obeisance to Claude, Bourbon knelt reverentially to his mother-in-law, and kissed her withered hand. The old duchess immediately raised him, and embraced him tenderly.

"Your looks bespeak trouble, my son," she said, regarding him anxiously. "Tell me what has happened?"

Bourbon relieved his bursting heart by a full description of his interview with the Duchess d'Angoulême, and the quarrel that had ensued between him and the king. Both Claude and the old duchess listened to his narration with profound interest. At its close, the queen said:

"I sympathise with you deeply, prince, but do not let the injuries you have received make you swerve from your loyalty to the king."

"Justice must and shall be done you, Charles," cried the Dame de Beaujeu. "I will go to the Duchess d'Angoulême at once. Your arm, Charles — give me your arm."

"You are not equal to the effort, madame," said the Constable.

"If it costs me my life, I will see her," cried the resolute old duchess. And she took a few steps, but her strength then utterly failed her, and she would have fallen but for the Constable's support.

Her physician and Cornelius Agrippa, who had been anxiously watching her, flew to her assistance.

"Oh! that I had but one hour left of my former strength! I should die content," she groaned.

"Drink of this, madame," said Cornelius Agrippa, offering her a phial. "It is a sovereign elixir, and will restore you."

But she had not strength to take the phial, and was evidently sinking.

Bourbon, however, placed the elixir to her lips, and made her swallow a few drops. The effect was instantaneous and almost magical. New strength seemed imparted to her limbs, the hue of health returned to her cadaverous cheeks, and she was able to stand without support.

"You have given me new life," she said to Agrippa.

"Waste not a moment of it, madame," he replied. "It may not be of long duration."

Just then, the great folding-doors at the end of the hall were thrown open, and the king, accompanied by the Duchess d'Angoulême and Bonnivet, entered the salon. Behind them came a crowd of courtiers,

amongst whom were Montmorency, Saint-Vallier, and René de Bretagne.

"I have my wish. She is here!" cried the old duchess.

On the entrance of the king, Claude advanced to meet him, and the Dame de Beaujeu followed closely behind her, marching with the firmness and majesty of former years. As he beheld her move along in this way, Mathieu Bernard observed to Agrippa:

"You have performed a miracle."

"I have but restored the vital energies for a moment," replied the other. "It is the last flash of the expiring taper."

The royal party met in the centre of the salon. Bourbon had followed his mother-in-law, and Saint-Vallier and René came over and stationed themselves beside him.

"I am sorry to learn, sire," said Claude, "that our cousin, the Constable de Bourbon, has incurred your displeasure. Let me intercede for him with your majesty."

"It is true that the Duke de Bourbon has deeply offended me," said the king. "But it is not too late for his restoration to favour."

"You hear that, prince," said Claude to the Constable. "All may yet be well."

"Sire," interposed the Dame de Beaujeu, "I ask for justice to my son-in-law, the Duke de Bourbon. Has he not served you faithfully? Has he not brought you men and treasure? Has he not bled for you in the field? And how has he been rewarded? By slights, by the withdrawal of his pensions, by the spoliation of his property, by disgrace, by dishonour. Sire, wrongs like these are enough to make a traitor of the noblest and most loyal heart in France."

"No wrong, madame, has been done to the Constable de Bourbon," rejoined the king. "But, if I am not misinformed, he has already played the traitor."

Bourbon looked sternly at the king, but took no other notice of the insinuation.

"Believe it not, sire," said the Dame de Beaujeu. "Whoso has told you that has spoken falsely," she added, glancing at the Duchess d'Angoulême. "Charles de Bourbon is no traitor. But goad him not to desperation by wrongs greater than any man can tamely endure."

"Peace, madame. You trouble the king," said the Duchess d'Angoulême.

"What!" exclaimed the Dame de Beaujeu, regarding her with unutterable scorn. "Is Anne of France, daughter of Louis XI., the wisest and the

greatest monarch that ever sat on the throne, to hold her peace at the bidding of Louise de Savoie? But I will *not* be silent. I will tell the king, your son, that he has done a flagrant act of injustice in aiding you to avenge yourself upon the Duke de Bourbon. All shall know the cause of your animosity."

"I will hear no more," cried François, impatiently.

"Listen to me, sire, I beseech you," said Queen Claude. "You have done Bourbon grievous wrong. Make him some amends. You know I rarely interfere with your proceedings, but in this case I cannot refrain. I would not have you commit injustice."

"Dou you also tax me with injustice?" said the king, frowning.

"I have said it, sire," she replied.

"I should be wanting in duty to your majesty if I remained silent," said Montmorency. "In my opinion, Bourbon has been unjustly treated."

"You, too, against me, marshal?" cried the king.

"I will answer for Bourbon's loyalty with my head, sire," said Saint-Vallier.

"And so will I," added René de Bretagne.

"I take you at your word, messieurs," replied François. "Charles de Bourbon, you are free to depart."

"Sire, you do wrong in granting this permission," said the Duchess d'Angoulême.

"Beware, madame," said the Dame de Beaujeu, stepping towards her. And clutching her hand, she whispered, "Interfere, and I will proclaim your infamy to all around."

Bourbon tarried not a moment. With a haughty obeisance, and with a look of ill-disguised menace at the king, he quitted the salon, followed by Saint-Vallier and René.

This time he experienced no hindrance from the guard, but passing through the vestibule, and descending the great horse-shoe staircase, he mounted his steed, and rode off with his escort.

As Cornelius Agrippa had predicted, the Dame de Beaujeu expired on her litter on the way back to Paris.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK II.

THE FLIGHT.

I.

The Secret Treaty.

At the ancient Château of Moulins, the abode of his illustrious ancestors, the Constable de Bourbon dwelt in princely state, maintaining a vast number of retainers, holding a court little inferior in splendour to that of the king, and exercising all the privileges of a powerful feudal suzerain. A grand and picturesque-looking structure was the château, and from its proud position dominated the town, and the rich vine-covered district around it. Not two leagues from Moulins was the abbey of Souvigny, a venerable Gothic pile, which was to the Dukes of Bourbon what Saint Denis was to the Kings of France — a mausoleum.

On his return from Fontainebleau to Moulins, Bourbon allowed no indication to appear from his manner that he was disturbed by the quarrel that had taken place between him and the king, though those in his confidence knew that he meditated revenge, and was making preparations for revolt.

Ere a week had elapsed, he received information through a trusty messenger that the Comte de

Beaurain, the ambassador of the Emperor, and Sir John Russell, the envoy of Henry VIII., had arrived at Bourg, in Bresse, where they proposed to await a communication from the Constable. The moment had now arrived when it became necessary for Bourbon to decide whether he would remain faithful to his sovereign, and bear tamely all the injuries he had received, or cast off his allegiance to François, and enter into a league with that monarch's enemies. The Constable was not long in arriving at a determination to adopt the latter course.

As it might excite the king's suspicions if he went to Bourg, and as it would be equally dangerous if the ambassadors attempted to come to Moulins, Bourbon appointed a meeting with them at Montbrison, the capital of the Haut-Forez, the most mountainous and inaccessible portion of his domains.

Under the pretext of a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame du Puy, he forthwith set out for the Château de Montbrison, accompanied by a great number of adherents on whose zeal and attachment he could rely, and who were prepared to second his projects, and take up arms in his cause. Chief among these were Saint-Vallier and René de Bretagne. Bourbon was also attended by his confidant, Philibert de Saint-Romain, Seigneur de Lurcy, the Seigneur de Pomperant, his two chamberlains, his two maîtres d'hôtel,

Antoine d'Espinat, lieutenant of his company of men-at-arms, the Bishops of Puy and Autun, both of whom had warmly embraced his cause, and a crowd of young seigneurs from the Bourbonnais, Auvergne, Forez, and Beaujolais.

On the third night after his arrival at Montbrison, while he was seated at supper with his retainers in the great banqueting-hall of the château, two strangers, who described themselves as merchants of Lyons, who were travelling to Clermont, claimed his hospitality.

The Constable at once gave them welcome, and assigned them seats at the lower table. Their attire accorded with the account they gave of themselves, but their bearing proclaimed them persons of rank, and Bourbon easily detected in one of them, a handsome, dark-complexioned man, with fine eyes and a very intelligent countenance, the Seigneur de Beaurain; while, though he was wholly unacquainted with the other — a well-made, but somewhat robust personage, with a bright fresh colour and light-brown locks — he judged him to be Sir John Russell, and he was right in the conjecture.

At the close of the meal, the Constable expressed a desire to converse with his new guests, and requested them to follow him to his private cabinet.

As soon as the door was closed, all disguise was

thrown aside, and Bourbon cordially welcomed Beaurain, and expressed the highest satisfaction at beholding the English envoy.

"I regret that I could not receive you in a manner befitting your rank, messeigneurs," he said. "I do not think I have any spies amid my household, but it is necessary to be cautious. And now be seated, I pray you, and let us address ourselves to the matter in hand."

"First, let me express the indignation which my royal master the Emperor feels at the infamous treatment experienced by your highness from the King of France," said Beaurain — "treatment as injudicious as unworthy, and which fully justifies any reprisals you may make."

"I have also to convey to your highness the expression of similar sentiments from my sovereign, King Henry VIII.," added Sir John Russell. "His majesty is highly indignant."

"I have not merely my own private wrongs to redress, messeigneurs," replied Bourbon, "but those of my country, which is suffering from bad government and oppression, and half ruined by a luxurious monarch, who ravages the people to enrich his mistresses and favourites. François de Valois is unworthy to occupy the throne of France."

"He shall not occupy it long," replied Beaurain,

with a significant smile. "But before proceeding further, let me offer my credentials to your highness. Here is a letter from the Emperor," he added, delivering a despatch to the Constable.

Bourbon took it, broke the seal, and read as follows:

"Cousin, — I send you the Sieur de Beaurain, my second chamberlain. Believe him as you would believe me, and doing so you will find me always your good cousin and friend,

"Charles."

"I am furnished by my august sovereign, King Henry VIII., with full powers to treat with your highness, as this letter will prove," said Sir John Russell, likewise delivering a despatch to the Constable.

"Enough, messires," observed Bourbon, after he had perused the second despatch, which was couched in nearly similar terms to the first. "These letters, though brief, are all I could desire."

"It is scarcely necessary for me to observe to your highness," said Beaurain, "that the Emperor my master, and his Majesty the King of England, are acting conjointly in this matter. As you are aware, they have entered into a league offensive and

defensive against France, and in this league they propose to include your highness."

"I am ready to engage in war against François I.," remarked Bourbon; "but, whatever may be the issue of the contest, I cannot consent to recognise Henry VIII. as King of France."

"Such recognition will not be required of your highness," observed Sir John Russell. "France will exist no longer. The realm will be divided between the three allies. The north will fall to the share of my royal master. The centre of the kingdom will be yours. The south will appertain to the Emperor."

"The partition can be discussed hereafter," rejoined Beaurain. "The kingdom must be conquered ere it can be divided. It is proposed that the invasion shall take place in this manner. The Emperor will penetrate France from Narbonne with eighteen thousand Spaniards, ten thousand German lanz-knechts, two thousand men of arms, and four thousand lances. Simultaneously with this attack, Henry VIII. will place fifteen thousand archers and five hundred horsemen in Picardy, and this force will be further augmented by six thousand men from the Low Countries. The invasion will take place when François is occupied with the expedition to Italy. Not till ten days after the kingdom has been attacked at either extremity by Spain and England

shall your highness raise the standard of rebellion, for fear of misadventure. At the expiration of that time you shall declare yourself. You will be aided by ten thousand lanz-knechts, enrolled for you in Germany, who will enter France through Bresse."

"I approve the plan," said Bourbon. "But by whom are the lanz-knechts to be paid?"

"The Emperor and his Majesty King Henry VIII. engage to furnish your highness with two hundred thousand crowns for their payment," returned Beaurain. "And the two monarchs further engage to sustain your highness against all your enemies, and to conclude no truce or treaty in which you are not comprehended."

"I am content," observed Bourbon.

"I trust your highness will be well satisfied with what I have further to propose," pursued Beaurain. "In order to prove the high esteem in which he holds you, the Emperor has commissioned me to offer you in marriage his sister, the widowed Queen of Portugal, with a dower of two hundred thousand crowns, without counting her own rental of twenty thousand crowns, besides jewels for five or six hundred thousand more. Or, if your highness prefer the Emperor's younger sister, the Infanta Catalina, you may have her, with a like dower. All his Imperial Majesty requires in return is, that you shall unite

yourself with him against all other persons, without exception."

"I choose the fair Queen of Portugal," replied Bourbon; "and I will give her as a dowry the Beaujolais, which produces twenty thousand crowns of revenue. I take you both to witness," he added, "that I now renounce my fealty to François I. I cast off my allegiance to that false and perfidious king, and transfer it to the Emperor Charles V."

"We attest your highness's renunciation," said both envoys, solemnly.

"And I accept your allegiance in the name of the Emperor," added Beaurain, with a look of satisfaction.

"Nothing now remains but to prepare the treaty," said Bourbon to the Imperial envoy.

Beaurain did not require a second order. Writing materials were on the table beside him, and he rapidly performed his task. The document having been approved by Bourbon and Sir John Russell, two copies were made of it, and when all had been duly signed, as well by the Constable as by the envoys, each retaining a copy, Beaurain observed, with a smile,

"Your highness is now pledged to us."

"I am bound to revolt and vengeance," replied Bourbon, "and my kingly allies will aid me in

my work. Hitherto, my device has been — *Spes.* Henceforth," he added, unsheathing his sword, and kissing the blade, "it shall be — '*Omnis spes in ferro est.*'"

Perfectly satisfied, the envoys were about to withdraw, when Bourbon detained them.

"Stay a moment, messeigneurs," he said. "I must send a messenger to the Emperor."

With this he sat down and wrote a letter, and, having sealed it, he summoned the Sieur de Bruzon, a gentleman entirely in his confidence, and said to him:

"The Seigneur de Beaurain, whom I here present to you, comes as an ambassador from the Emperor, to offer me the Queen of Portugal in marriage. You will accompany him on his return, and will deliver this letter into the hands of his Imperial Majesty, saying that I recommend myself very humbly to his good grace, and thank him heartily for the signal honour he has shown me in offering me his sister. Add, that he will ever find me his good brother and friend. Say this to him."

"I shall not fail," replied Bruzon.

"Since our errand is completed, we will take leave of your highness," said Beaurain. "We shall start two hours before daybreak, and make the best of our way back to Bourg. Immediately on my

arrival there I will despatch a courier to the Arch-Duke Ferdinand, enjoining him, in the Emperor's name, to enrol the ten thousand lanz-knechts who are to be placed under your highness's command. This done, I shall set out for Genoa, and embark thence for Spain."

"And I shall make my way as speedily as may be for England," said Sir John Russell.

"Commend me heartily to your royal master," said the Constable, "and remind him of what passed between us at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Farewell, messeigneurs! Heaven speed you on your journey! A guard shall attend you over the mountains of Forez. See that men are in readiness, Bruzon."

"We thank your highness," said Beaurain. "Heaven prosper the cause in which you have embarked!"

The two envoys then quitted the cabinet, attended by Bruzon.

"Can I hope that Heaven will prosper the cause of treason and rebellion?" exclaimed Bourbon, as soon as he was left alone. "But reflection comes too late. The step is taken. I must on."

At this moment the door opened, and the Comte de Saint-Vallier entered the cabinet.

II.

How Saint-Vallier remonstrated with the Constable.

"Do I disturb you?" said Saint-Vallier. "I would fain have a few words with you in reference to those two merchants from Lyons, who have been so long closeted with you. They are not what they pretend to be."

"You are right, cousin," replied the Constable. "I am glad you are come. I desire to unbosom myself to you of a secret that weighs upon my soul. You know that the affection I bear for you is as great as that which I formerly entertained for my brother, François de Bourbon, Duke de Châtelleraut, who fell by my side at Marignan. I can entirely confide in you. But the secret I am about to disclose is of vast importance, and concerns others besides myself. Swear, therefore, on this fragment of the true cross," he added, holding towards him a reliquary which hung by a gold chain from his neck —"swear upon this that you will never reveal what I am about to impart."

Saint-Vallier having taken the oath, the Constable proceeded to disclose all that had taken place

between him and the two envoys. Saint-Vallier listened in silence, but his countenance showed he was deeply distressed by the recital.

When Bourbon had ended, he said:

"Monseigneur, you have declared that you love me as the brother you bewail. As that brother would have spoken, had he been living, I will now speak to you. The Duke de Châtelleraut followed you in your glorious career, but he would not have followed you in the career in which you are about to embark. He would never have been a traitor and a rebel."

"By Saint Paul! he would not have endured the wrongs I have endured, and which have made me what I am," rejoined the Constable.

"I grant you have had great wrongs," rejoined Saint-Vallier; "but this is not the way to avenge them. You are about to destroy yourself or your country. Weigh well what I say. If the plot is discovered, your doom is certain, and you will die with infamy. If the design succeeds, you will aid the enemies of your country, to whom your name has been hitherto redoubtable, and who seek you, not because they sympathise with your wrongs, but because they believe you can serve them. But pause, I implore you, before the fatal step be irrevocably taken. Pause before you declare yourself a rebel. The king may deprive you of your possessions, but

he cannot deprive you of your renown, which ought to be dearer to you than wealth and power. No one can rob you of your glory but yourself. Would you incur the scorn and reproach of the haughty nobles who have made you their model? Would you desert that youthful chivalry who have striven to emulate your valour, and whom you have led on to conquest? Would you turn your arms against those soldiers of whom you have so long been the hero and the idol? Will not your breast be torn with anguish and remorse as you listen to the cries of desolated France, while she shrieks in your ears, 'Bourbon was the defender of his country, and has become its scourge'?"

Bourbon was much moved at this appeal, and Saint-Vallier believed he had made the desired impression upon him, as the Constable remained for some time absorbed in thought. But he was mistaken, for Bourbon suddenly exclaimed,

"I cannot renounce my project. It is too late."

"No, it is not too late," rejoined Saint-Vallier. "The envoys have not departed. Send for them. Reclaim the treaty."

At this moment Bruzon entered the cabinet.

"Highness, a messenger has just arrived from the king," he said. "It is the Seigneur Perot de Warthy, and from what I gather he brings good tidings."

"He can scarce bring good tidings from the king; but I will see him," replied the Constable.

Following Bruzon to the door, Saint-Vallier said to him, in a low tone,

"Bid those two merchants from Lyons come hither. His highness desires further speech with them."

A few moments afterwards, the Seigneur Perot de Warthy, a gallant-looking young cavalier, clad in a rich riding-dress, though somewhat travel-stained, was ushered into the cabinet by Bruzon. Close behind them followed the two envoys, whose reappearance excited Bourbon's surprise, though he made no remark.

"What is your errand, Seigneur de Warthy?" demanded the Constable of the messenger.

"I bring this despatch for your highness," replied Warthy. "The king is about to set out on the expedition to Italy ——"

"And he has summoned me to attend him — ha?" interrupted Bourbon.

"No, prince," replied Warthy. "His majesty has been pleased to appoint you lieutenant-general of the kingdom, to regulate, in conjunction with the Duchess d'Angoulême, all affairs of state during his absence."

"Lieutenant-general of the kingdom!" exclaimed

Bourbon, astonished. "Has his majesty bestowed that appointment upon me? I expected a far different message."

"It is as I have stated to your highness," said Warthy. "There you will find the brevet."

"The king relents towards you, cousin," whispered Saint-Vallier. "He is about to restore you to favour. All that has been done has been merely to try you."

"He has not abandoned the hope of reconciling me to the duchess," rejoined Bourbon, in the same tone. "This is her handiwork. Seigneur Perot de Warthy," he added, turning to him, "I must pray you accept this ring," taking one from his finger and presenting it to him. "I will charge you with my thanks to the king to-morrow. Let all hospitality be shown him," he added to Bruzon who bowed and withdrew with the messenger.

"Now is the moment," whispered Saint-Vallier. "The envoys are here. Reclaim the treaty."

"Has your highness anything further to say to us?" demanded Beaurain, uneasily.

"No," replied Bourbon, approaching him. "The king has tried to lure me back in vain. I adhere to my resolution. Good night, messeigneurs."

The two envoys bowed and retired.

"He is lost!" exclaimed Saint-Vallier.

III.

Showing how the Plot progressed.

LONG before daylight, the two envoys, accompanied by Bruzon and a guard, quitted the Château de Montbrison. On the same day, at a later hour, Perot de Warthy set out on his return to the Palais des Tournelles.

As soon as the king's messenger had departed, Bourbon held a private council in his cabinet, at which were present the Bishops of Puy and Autun, Aymard de Prie, Seigneur de Montpoupon, La Clayette, and Saint-Saphorin, two brave and experienced captains, who had served under him in the Milanese, and the Seigneur de Lurcy. Having bound them to secresy, he acquainted them with the treaty he had entered into with the Emperor and the King of England. None of his auditors attempted to dissuade him from the design, but, on the contrary, all approved of it, and agreed to lend their aid in its furtherance.

"It behoves your highness to exercise the utmost caution in making your preparations," said Saint-Saphorin. "Perot de Warthy, who has just left,

has been asking many questions concerning your movements, and he appeared to have some suspicion of the real character of the two pretended Lyons merchants."

"Be assured I will act with all due caution," said the Constable. "I was on my guard with Warthy, as I believe him to be a spy. But it is absolutely necessary to ascertain how many partisans I can count upon, and how many men I can raise."

"When so many have to be trusted, some rumours of the plot are sure to reach the ears of the king," observed the Bishop de Puy. "I would advise your highness to wait till his majesty has set out for Italy. It will be time enough to levy your troops when he has crossed the Alps, and cannot return."

"No, no; at all hazards I must prepare," replied Bourbon, impatiently. "You, my lord bishop, have professed your readiness to serve me. I shall now put your zeal to the test, by charging you with a mission to my uncle, the Duke de Savoie, urging him to declare himself in my favour as soon as the rebellion shall occur, and to prepare for that event."

"I will undertake the mission," replied the bishop. "But it is not devoid of danger. If I am taken, my

sacred character will not protect me from the king's vengeance."

"You have nothing to fear," said Bourbon. "No letters shall betray your purpose. Tell the Duke de Savoie that I can count upon two thousand gentlemen who have pledged themselves to stand by me in any event, and to bring retainers with them. Tell him also that I can make sure of four thousand fantassins in the Pays de Vaud and Faucigny. Am I not right, captain?" he added, turning to Saint-Saphorin.

"I will answer for the men," replied the other.

"And I will undertake to raise as many more in the Beaujolais and the principality of Dombes," said La Clayette.

"I will undertake to hold Dijon," said Aymard de Prie. "I am in command of the garrison, and will introduce a thousand men into the city."

"Your highness will have men enough, I doubt not," said the Bishop of Autun. "Half France will flock to your standard when it is once displayed. But do not neglect precautionary measures in the interim. If you should be betrayed, and fall into the king's hands, he will show you no mercy.

"I am fully aware of the risk I run, my lord bishop," replied Bourbon; "and, for fear of mishap,

I will fortify my two strongholds of Chantelle and Carlat, and furnish them with men and provisions, so as to secure a safe retreat."

"Has your highness any commission for me?" inquired the Seigneur de Lurcy.

"Yes, an important one, which I know you will execute to my satisfaction," replied the Constable. "You shall despatch a messenger to Jacques de Matignon and Jacques d'Argouges, two young Norman seigneurs, who are attached to me, appointing a meeting with them at Vendôme. They will attend the rendezvous, I doubt not, and you will then reveal the plot to them, and engage them to facilitate the disembarkation of the English, and the occupation of the province by the Duke of Suffolk."

"Think you they can be trusted?" said Lurcy.

"Most assuredly," replied Bourbon. "Tempt them with the offer of the government of Normandy. With that inducement they will not hesitate."

"Your highness's instructions shall be carefully fulfilled," replied Lurcy.

"Do you propose to remain here till the outbreak, prince?" inquired the Bishop of Autun.

"No," replied Bourbon. "I shall return forthwith to Moulins, and, in order to avoid a summons

to join the king, I shall feign illness, and remain secluded till his majesty has set out for Italy."

"You will do well," observed the bishop. "Such a course will disarm suspicion."

Next morning it was reported throughout the château that the Constable had been seized with fever. His physicians declared that the air of Montbrison disagreed with him, and advised his return to Moulins, as soon as he was able to bear the journey. Before complying with the recommendation, Bourbon despatched a messenger to François, who was then staying at the palace of the Tournelles, excusing himself on the plea of severe indisposition from repairing to Paris.

Meantime, the Bishop de Puy set out on his mission to the Duke de Savoie, Aymard de Prie proceeded with his troops to Dijon, and Lurcy was on his way to keep the rendezvous he had appointed with Matignon and D'Argouges at Vendôme.

Thus it will be seen that some little progress had been made in the plot.

IV.

The Comte de Maulévrier.

By the time the Constable had returned to the Château de Moulins, François had completed his preparations for the war in Italy. Bonnivet, at the head of a large force, had already crossed the Alps, and Lautrec and Lescun had been sent to defend the frontiers from the Spaniards.

Having paid a visit to the cathedral of Saint Denis, for the purpose of solemnly invoking the aid of the patron saint of France, and offered up his devotions in the Sainte Chapelle; having also publicly appointed his mother Regent of the kingdom during his absence, he set out with a large attendance, comprising the flower of the French chivalry.

His march rather resembled a journey of pleasure than a warlike expedition, inasmuch as he was accompanied by the Comtesse de Châteaubriand and several other beautiful dames. The royal cortége was preceded by the Grand-Master of France at the head of two thousand lansquenets, and followed by

the Duke de Longueville, with a large troop of horse.

Proceeding by easy stages, François had reached Saint-Pierre-le-Moutier, which was within half a day's journey of the Château de Moulins, and was passing the evening festively, as was his wont, when he was disturbed by the sudden arrival of Louis de Brézé, Comte de Maulévrier, grand seneschal and lieutenant-general of Normandy, whom we have already mentioned as the husband of the beautiful Diane de Poitiers, daughter of the Comte de Saint-Vallier.

François at once granted him the private interview he desired, and, as soon as they were alone, Maulévrier said,

"Sire, prepare yourself for bad tidings. What I have to tell you I fear will arrest your expedition to Italy. I come to warn your majesty of a most formidable conspiracy, the object of which is to deprive you of your kingdom, and perhaps of your life. Fortunately, the discovery has been made before the mine could be sprung. Fortunately, also, for the purposes of justice, the chief contriver of the plot is in your majesty's power."

"There is only one person in the kingdom who could contrive such a plot," replied the king. "But

I do not think the Constable de Bourbon capable of a crime so heinous."

"The Constable de Bourbon is guilty of the blackest treason, sire," replied Maulévrier. "He has allied himself to the Emperor and to the King of England, and while an invasion is made upon your kingdom by those two sovereigns, he designs to break out into revolt. This is no idle accusation, sire. I will give proofs of the truth of what I assert. Two young Norman seigneurs of high honour and distinction, Matignon and D'Argouges, with whose names your majesty must be familiar, met Bourbon's confidential agent, Lurcy, by appointment at Vendôme. At this meeting Lurcy disclosed to them the whole conspiracy, and offered them the government of Normandy and other high posts, on the condition that they should assist the disembarkation of the English on our coasts. The treasonable offer filled the two loyal gentlemen with horror, and they indignantly rejected it, but, as they had been sworn to secresy, they could not reveal it. However, they confessed the conspiracy to the Bishop of Lisieux, who, appalled at its enormity, at once made it known to me, and I have not lost a moment in warning your majesty of the danger with which you and your loyal subjects are threatened. Heaven be praised, you have hitherto escaped!"

Astounded by this terrible communication, to which he would willingly have refused credit, the king remained for some time buried in reflection. At length he said:

"Comte de Maulévrier, I charge you not to let fall a word in regard to this conspiracy. I will give Bourbon a last chance. I will see him to-morrow at the Château de Moulins."

Maulévrier would have remonstrated, but perceiving that the king was resolved, he said no more.

François, however, did not neglect needful precautions. Without assigning any reason for the step, he immediately despatched an order to the grand-master, who was a day in advance of the royal cavalcade, enjoining him to return at once, and he directed the Duke de Longueville to scour the country round with his cavalry.

Next day the king rode on to Moulins, where he found the grand-master awaiting him with the two thousand lansquenets. With this force, and with the troop of the Duke de Longueville, François felt no apprehension of outbreak.

After ordering the town to be invested at all points, he entered the château with a numerous guard, and demanded the keys, which were at once

delivered to him by Philippe des Escures, Bourbon's chamberlain.

François then dismounted, and said, in an angry tone,

"Why is not the Lord Constable here to welcome me? Bid him come to me at once."

"Sire," replied the chamberlain, "the Constable is full of grief that he cannot receive your majesty in person. He is confined to his chamber by severe illness, and cannot stir forth without imperilling his life."

"Ha!" exclaimed the king, with an incredulous look. "I may be able to find a more efficacious remedy for his illness than his physicians have employed. Take me to his chamber."

"Let me go with you, I pray you, sire?" said Maulévrier, who was standing near the king.

François, however, declined, and entered the château. Conducted by the chamberlain, whose looks proclaimed his alarm, he then proceeded to the duke's chamber.

V.

What passed in the Sick Man's Chamber.

The king was ushered into the sick man's chamber. It was large and gloomy, wainscoted with oak as black as ebony, and the panels were adorned with portraits of the Constable's illustrious ancestors, commencing with Robert, Comte de Clermont, sixth son of Saint Louis, and Beatrix de Bourgogne, daughter of John de Bourgogne, and heiress of Bourbon-l'Archambaud, from whom the house of Bourbon derived its name, and concluding with the father of the Constable, Gilbert de Montpensier, slain at Pozzuoli in the war against Naples by Charles VIII., and Clara de Gonzaga, the Constable's mother, a princess remarkable for her beauty.

On a couch, at the farther end of this sombre apartment, lay the sick man, wrapped in a loose gown of quilted silk, trimmed with sable. He had a black taffeta cap on his head, and a furred velvet mantle was thrown over his knees. Beside him, on a table placed within reach, stood a crystal flagon containing a dark-coloured liquid, and several small phials. The only person with him at the moment was his principal physician, Jean de l'Hôpital.

On the entrance of the king, who was ceremoniously announced by the chamberlain, Bourbon, aided by his physician, arose, and bowing, thanked his majesty for his gracious visit.

"I am sorry to find you so unwell, cousin," replied the king, regarding him as closely as the gloom of the chamber would permit, and coming to the conclusion that his illness was simulated.

Bourbon bore the scrutiny without embarrassment.

"The saints be praised that your majesty has come at a time when the fit has just left me," he said, "and when I am secure from the attack for a few hours. But I am greatly prostrated," he added, feebly — "greatly prostrated."

The king bade him be seated, adding, that he desired to confer with him in private, whereupon Bourbon signed to his attendants to withdraw.

Before quitting the chamber, Jean de l'Hôpital observed, in an under tone to the king,

"His highness has been dangerously ill, sire, and is not yet out of danger."

Then making an obeisance, he retired.

The chamberlain having placed a chair for the king near Bourbon's couch, likewise bowed and withdrew.

After glancing round to make sure they were quite alone, François said,

"I will deal plainly with you, cousin. Some disclosures have been made to me respecting your practices which I would willingly not believe, and before taking any steps to ascertain the truth of the reports, I have resolved to give you an opportunity of explanation."

"My enemies have been at work, I perceive, sire," said Bourbon, without manifesting the slightest uneasiness. "What has been told your majesty?"

"I have been informed," replied François, "that, forgetful of your allegiance to me, you have entered into a treasonable league with my enemies, the Emperor and Henry VIII. This is what I have been told, cousin, but, as I have said, I am unwilling to believe it."

"Sire," replied Bourbon, "you have not been misinformed. Overtures have been made me by the Emperor and the King of England, who thought, not unnaturally, that the treatment I have experienced from your majesty must have deeply dissatisfied me."

"They thought you were prepared to become a traitor," cried François. "Foi de gentilhomme! I scarcely expected you to make so frank an avowal. They knew you to be ready to revolt—ha!"

"They knew I had endured wrongs enough to make me a rebel," rejoined Bourbon. "But they were mistaken, sire — they were mistaken."

"Then you rejected the offers?" said the king.

"I still indulged hopes that your majesty would render me justice."

"Justice you shall have, cousin — strict justice," rejoined the king. "Now listen to me. I suspect — nay, I am certain — that you are engaged in a conspiracy against me, and against the state. The two young Norman seigneurs, Matignon and D'Argouges, have disclosed the treasonable proposition made to them on your part by Lurcy. You look confounded, as well you may. You see I have ample proof of your guilt, but I can obtain plenty more by arresting all your principal adherents who are now assembled in this château. Not one of them can escape me."

"Be not too sure of that, sire," said Bourbon.

"You fancy you can protect them," rejoined the king. "Learn that I am master of your castle. Its courts are filled with my archers — its walls are surrounded by my troops — its keys are in my possession. I have only to give the word to cause your arrest."

"Your majesty will never give that word," rejoined Bourbon, calmly.

"Wherefore not?" cried François, striding towards the door, as if with the design of putting his threat into execution. "What ho, there! — who waits?"

But the door was shut, and no one answered the summons, though the king repeated it still more lustily.

"What means this?" he cried, glancing furiously at Bourbon, who had risen from his couch, and thrown off his loose robe, showing that he was armed.

"It means, sire," replied the Constable, "that the door will not be opened save at my order. Your majesty may be assured," he added, with stern significance, "that those who enter this chamber will not arrest *me*."

"Ha, traitor! do you mean me mischief?" exclaimed the king.

"Your majesty has come hither alone. I did not invite you. But you are perfectly safe, provided you pledge your royal word that no arrests shall be made."

François hesitated for a moment, and then returned his half-drawn sword to the scabbard.

"Let us understand each other, Bourbon," he said. "I had no design to proceed to extremities with you. Had it been so, I should have ordered

your immediate arrest on my arrival at the château. My wish, as you must have perceived, was to confer amicably with you. I do not desire your destruction — on the contrary, I am well disposed towards you — ay, well disposed. Abandon your fatal design — prove to me that you are faithful and loyal as heretofore, and you shall find me forgiving and generous. Be true to your sovereign, and we will be true to you. Whatever may be the decree of the Parliament, you shall keep your possessions. The utmost wish of your soaring ambition shall be gratified. You shall accompany me to Italy, and shall share with me the command of the army. Will this content you?"

"Sire, it is far more than I could expect," replied Bourbon. "I thought I had entirely forfeited your favour."

"Ingrate! — how could you think so, when I but lately appointed you lieutenant-general of the kingdom? That appointment ought to have convinced you that, in spite of our misunderstanding, I still had the greatest regard for you. I know your merits as a leader, and am certain you will add to your renown in this campaign. You shall help me to re-conquer the Milanese, as you helped me at Marignan to win it."

"I hope to convince your majesty that I am

worthy of the distinguished honour you propose to confer upon me," said Bourbon.

"The appointment shall be announced at once, and will set at rest all rumours to your disadvantage," said François. "To-morrow you shall set out with me for Lyons."

"Alas! sire, I am utterly unable to travel in my present state. I could not even enter a litter. My physicians will tell you so."

"'Tis a strange disorder that afflicts you, cousin," observed François, with an incredulous look. "You appear strong enough for service in the field."

"You must not judge me by my looks, sire. When the fit seizes me, I am utterly prostrated. But I shall be better in a few days."

"You think so?" cried the king. "Well, then, I will wait for you at Lyons."

"I would not have your majesty delay the expedition on my account. As soon as I am able to move, I will follow you to Italy."

"No, no, I will not start without you," rejoined the king, suspiciously. "You shall join me at Lyons as speedily as you can."

At this moment a side-door was opened, and a young dame, richly attired, and of surpassing beauty, entered the chamber.

VI.

Diane de Poitiers.

On seeing the king, she would have instantly retreated, but he commanded her to stay.

"Do not let my presence alarm you, fair lady," he said. "And do not suppose you interrupt me, for I have finished my conference with the Lord Constable."

The young dame, who seemed much embarrassed, made a profound obeisance, but did not advance. As we have said, she was exquisitely beautiful. Her features might have been modelled by Praxiteles, and her figure was tall and admirably proportioned. She was attired in green velvet, embroidered with flowers of damask, gold, and pearls, with the sleeves puffed and quilted, and her head-dress, which was very becomingly fashioned, was ornamented with pearls and other precious stones.

"I am trying to recal your features, fair lady," said the king, approaching her, and regarding her with undisguised admiration, "but I do not think I can have seen you before. Such a lovely face as

yours — such lustrous eyes — and such a form — must have made a lasting impression upon me. Yet you must have been at court."

"No, sire, my father, the Comte de Saint-Vallier, never took me to court," she replied.

"How?" exclaimed François, surprised. "Are you the charming Diane de Poitiers, who, by bestowing your hand upon the Comte de Maulévrier, have made him the most enviable of mortals?"

"It is my misfortune, sire, to be the wife of the Comte de Maulévrier," she replied.

"Your misfortune! ha!" exclaimed the king. "Are you aware that your husband is here?"

"Here, sire?" exclaimed Diane, uneasily.

"Nay, be not alarmed," replied François, smiling. "He has not come for the purpose of taking you back to the Château de Brézé. He brought me some important intelligence from Normandy."

"'Tis Maulévrier, then, who has revealed the plot," mentally ejaculated Bourbon.

"I should not return with him, if he desired it," said Diane. "Your majesty must understand that the comte and I have quarrelled."

"Quarrelled! ah!" exclaimed François. "And

so you took refuge from the husband you hate with the Duke de Bourbon — eh?"

"I do not hate my husband, sire, though he has compelled me to leave him. I came to the Château de Moulins with my father."

"And you expected to find your father with the Constable when you entered so suddenly just now, eh?" remarked the king, dryly.

"I did, sire. I came to inform them of your arrival at the château — little expecting to find your majesty here. I trust I may infer from your gracious and kindly aspect that the Constable is restored to favour?"

"He is fully restored," replied the king. "You will be pleased, I am sure, to learn that I have just promised him the command of half my Italian army."

"You have done well, sire," she rejoined. "With Bourbon in joint command with your majesty, victory will be assured. You will accompany the king?" she added to the Constable, with evident anxiety.

"I hope to do so," he replied. "At all events, I will follow as soon as my strength will permit me."

"Nay, I must have you with me," said the king.

"Right, sire — do not leave him behind," she whispered.

"I know the way to enforce obedience on the Constable's part," said the king. "I shall take you with me to Lyons, fair Diane. He will follow quickly then."

"Sire!" exclaimed Bourbon, with ill-concealed vexation, "the countess is here with her father!"

"What of that? I shall not ask his consent," replied the king. "The only person who has any right to object is Maulévrier, and he is not likely to interfere. The Comtesse de Châteaubriand and a large party of court dames are in my train," he added to Diane. "You shall accompany them." He then continued in a low voice: "I cannot doubt the great influence you possess over Bourbon. What you say to him he will obey. Charge him, therefore, to join me a week hence at Lyons."

And he moved towards the other side of the chamber, as if to examine the portrait of the beautiful Clara de Gonzaga.

Diane instantly took advantage of the opportunity, and, approaching Bourbon, said, in a low voice,

"You have accepted the king's offer? You will break with the Emperor and Henry VIII., will you not?"

"It is too late," replied the Constable, in the same tone. "I have signed the compact."

"But consider that the king has promised to share the command of the army with you?" she urged.

"Promises made by princes under such circumstances are rarely kept," replied Bourbon. "I can never be really restored to the king's favour."

"You wrong him," she said. "He is the soul of loyalty and honour."

"He loyal!" echoed Bourbon. "He is perfidious as his mother. I will not trust him."

"That is your determination?"

"My fixed determination," he rejoined.

"Then we shall never meet again — never, Charles," she said.

Bourbon made no reply, and his head sank upon his breast. At this moment the king turned round.

"Have you prevailed upon him, fair Diane?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, he will come, sire," she answered, hastily. "You will?" she added to Bourbon, with an entreating look that ought to have been irresistible.

"You have said it," he rejoined.

"That is well," observed the king. "I knew you could not resist her persuasion."

Just then the door opened, and Jean de l'Hôpital entered the room.

"I crave your majesty's pardon for this interruption," he said, "but I am compelled to attend to my illustrious patient. It is necessary that his highness should take the draught prepared for him."

"I applaud your zeal, sir," replied François, "and I enjoin you to use all your art to restore the prince your master to health as quickly as may be. Think you he will be able to set out for Lyons in three days' time?"

"I will not answer for it, sire," replied Jean de l'Hôpital, consulting Bourbon by a look.

"In a week, then?" demanded the king.

"Perchance in a week, sire," replied the physician. "But he must travel slowly, for even then he will be very feeble."

"Come hither, sir," said the king, taking Jean de l'Hôpital aside. "Answer me truly, as you value your life. What ails the Constable?"

"His highness is labouring under a severe quotidian ague, caught at Montbrison," replied the physician. "The fever has proved of singular obstinacy, and will not yield to ordinary remedies. We are under great apprehensions," he added, lowering his voice, "that it may be followed by some mortal ailment, as consumption, or the black

jaundice. His state is exceedingly critical, and demands the utmost care. Were he to take cold, I would not answer for his life."

"Hark ye, sir," said the king. "I know you *can* speedily cure him, if you will. Within a week I expect to see him at Lyons."

"I cannot perform impossibilities, sire," replied the physician; "but if it be in the power of medical skill to further your majesty's desires, you shall behold him at the time appointed."

Apparently satisfied, François then turned towards the Constable, and said:

"Adieu, cousin. I commend you to the care of your physician. But as I shall naturally be anxious to hear how you progress, I will leave behind me the Seigneur Perot de Warthy, who will send me daily tidings of you."

"That is needless, sire," said Bourbon, impatiently. "Since you are pleased to express so much anxiety about me, I will despatch frequent messengers to you with the reports of my physicians."

"I prefer leaving Warthy," rejoined the king. "I can depend on him. Once more adieu, cousin. We shall meet again at Lyons."

And, offering his hand to Diane, he led her out of the room.

VII.

Perot de Warthy.

SCARCELY were they gone, when Bourbon sprang to his feet, and gave vent to an outburst of rage.

"By Heaven! I have had enough to do to play my part!" he exclaimed.

"I pray your highness to calm yourself!" cried Jean de l'Hôpital. "His majesty may return."

"I wish he would return!" exclaimed Bourbon. "I was a fool to allow him to depart. But I must take instant counsel with my friends."

So saying, he thrice struck a small bell placed upon the table.

At the summons, a secret door opened, and a dozen young seigneurs, all of whom were armed, issued from a closet where they had been concealed. These persons were Bourbon's most devoted partisans, and comprised the Seigneurs Pomperant, François du Peloux, Tansannes, Espinat, Sainte-Bonnet-Desguières, Brion, and five others.

"We have been impatiently awaiting the signal to come forth," said Pomperant. "But it seems our

services were not required. I am sorry your highness allowed the king to depart."

"You shall hear what has occurred, and judge whether I have acted wisely," rejoined Bourbon.

And he then proceeded to relate what had passed between him and the monarch.

"I would not trust him!" exclaimed Tansannes. "His promises are worthless. How say you, messeigneurs?" he added to the others. "Are you not of my opinion?"

There was a unanimous reply in the affirmative.

"It is not too late," said Pomperant. "We may yet secure his person. Entrust the matter to me. We have force enough to overpower the royal guard."

"The opportunity is tempting, I own," said Bourbon. "But the plan is too hazardous. It occurred to me while the king stood before me — but I rejected it."

"You did well, prince," remarked Saint-Vallier, who had entered the chamber by the same door that had admitted his daughter. "If you had seized the king, your own doom would have been certain."

"Who would have pronounced the sentence?" remarked Pomperant, sternly. "I repeat, it is not

too late to secure the king. Your highness has but to say the word, and it shall be done."

"Ay, we are ready to execute your highness's orders, be they what they may," added the others.

"Are you all mad?" exclaimed Saint-Vallier. "Know you not that the archers of the royal guard are in the court of the château? — that the Duke de Longueville has four troops of light horse drawn up outside the gates? — that the town is invested by two thousand lansquenets, under the command of the Grand-Master? Any such attempt must end in discomfiture."

"We can carry off the king before his capture is discovered," said Pomperant.

"Impossible!" cried Saint-Vallier.

"You are lukewarm in the cause, cousin," said Bourbon. "Perhaps you may feel differently when I inform you that his majesty designs to take your daughter, the Comtesse de Maulévrier, with him to Lyons."

"Ha!" exclaimed Saint-Vallier, as if struck by a sharp pang. "Rather than this should be, I would consent to his capture."

"Who is mad now, M. le Comte?" remarked Pomperant. "Will you entrust the beautiful Diane to this profligate monarch?"

"No, I would sooner see her perish," rejoined Saint-Vallier. "I will agree to any plan."

At this moment a warning exclamation was uttered by the physician who was stationed near the door.

At the signal, Bourbon hastily resumed his gown, and flung himself upon the couch.

Scarcely were these preparations completed, when Perot de Warthy and the Comte de Maulévrier entered. They both glanced suspiciously at the band of young seigneurs, who had withdrawn to the back of the chamber.

Saint-Vallier alone remained standing near the couch on which Bourbon was extended.

"What is your business with me, sir?" demanded the Constable of Warthy.

"I am enjoined by his majesty to remain in constant attendance upon your highness," replied the other, bowing.

"This fellow troubles me," muttered Bourbon; "I must get rid of him."

"Louis," said Saint-Vallier to his son-in-law, "I am glad you have come hither. I was about to seek you. You must take back Diane to Normandy."

"I cannot comply with your request," replied

Maulévrier. "I return to the Château de Brézé forthwith."

"So much the better," cried Saint-Vallier. "Diane must accompany you."

"Impossible," replied Maulévrier. "She is gone with the Comtesse de Châteaubriand and the king to Lyons."

"Gone!" exclaimed Bourbon, starting up. "Has the king set out? I thought he meant to pass the night here?"

"He has changed his mind, and has just quitted the château with his suite."

"And you have allowed Diane to accompany him?" demanded Saint-Vallier, with a look of agony.

"Mort-Dieu! I could not prevent it," replied Maulévrier — "even if I had the wish," he added to himself.

Saint-Vallier made no remark, but it was easy to perceive his anguish.

Greatly excited by the unlooked-for intelligence, Bourbon could scarcely rest upon the couch.

"I cannot comprehend why the king should depart so suddenly," he said to Warthy. "Has he taken the troops with him?"

"No," replied the other. "He is only attended by the archers of the royal guard, and the young

nobles forming his retinue. The Grand-Master and the Duke de Longueville are left behind with their men."

"For what purpose?" demanded Bourbon, sternly.

"To keep guard upon the château and the town," replied Warthy.

Bourbon exchanged a glance with his followers, which did not pass unobserved by Warthy.

"His majesty's parting order," remarked that vigilant personage, "was that no one — not even your highness — should be allowed to quit the château till to-morrow."

"Ha! By Saint Paul, it would seem we are prisoners, messeigneurs!" exclaimed the Constable, fiercely.

An indignant response was made by his adherents.

"No offence is intended to your highness by his majesty," said Warthy. "It is a mere measure of precaution — nothing more." Then, turning to Saint-Vallier, he added: "M. le Comte, it is the king's pleasure that you proceed to Lyons to-morrow."

"I will go now!" cried Saint-Vallier.

"That may not be," replied the other. "As I have just said, no one must quit the château to-day, on any pretext whatever."

"The keys of the château have been entrusted to me," said Maulévrier. "To morrow I shall return them to the Seigneur des Ecures, your highness's chamberlain. If you have aught to say to me," he added to Saint-Vallier, "you will find me in the great hall."

So saying, he quitted the chamber.

"Why do you not go too, sir?" cried Bourbon, fiercely, to Warthy, finding that the latter remained.

"His majesty's injunctions to me were ——"

"Leave me," interrupted Bourbon.

"I cannot disobey the king," cried the pertinacious Warthy.

But his remonstrances were cut short by Pomperant and the others, who forced him out of the room.

"Will no one deliver me from this plague?" exclaimed the Constable, springing from his couch.

"We will," replied several voices.

"Be advised by me, cousin, and do him no mischief," interposed Saint-Vallier. "The annoyance is hard to endure — but bear it. By skilful management, aided by your physicians, you may lead this spy to give such reports to the king as may cause him to set out for Italy without you. Hitherto, as you know, I have strenuously opposed the plot,

but my opinion is now changed. I would have it succeed. Be prudent, cousin, and our wrongs shall be avenged."

"I will follow your counsel," rejoined Bourbon. "But do you intend to obey the king's order, and proceed to Lyons?"

"'Tis needful I should do so," replied Saint-Vallier. "My first business must be to deliver Diane. It is idle to hope for aid from her base-souled husband; but I will talk to him. Be content to play the sick man a little longer, cousin. It is of the last importance to your cause that the king should set out for Italy without you."

So saying, he left the room, and sought Maulévrier in the great hall. But he produced no impression on his cold-hearted son-in-law.

VIII.

How Bourbon quitted the Chateau de Moulins.

NEXT morning, Maulévrier delivered up the keys of the château to the chamberlain, and, without seeking any further interview with the Constable, set off for Normandy.

By noon both the Grand-Master and the Duke de Longueville had quitted Moulins with their men, and were marching towards La Palisse. Saint-Vallier accompanied them. Warthy, however, remained, and Bourbon submitted to the annoyance of his frequent visits. If Jean de l'Hôpital could be believed, no improvement had taken place in the Constable's health.

Three days passed in this manner, but, on the morning of the fourth, Warthy made his appearance in a riding-dress, booted and spurred, and informed the Constable, who was lying on his couch as usual, and attended by his physicians, that he was about to set out for Lyons to make a report in person to the king.

"Express my profound regrets to his majesty that I am not able to join him," said Bourbon, se-

cretly overjoyed by the anticipated departure of his tormentor. "As you yourself must have perceived, I am rather worse than better, and my physicians tell me — and indeed I myself perceive — that there is no prospect of immediate improvement. I would pray the king, therefore, not to wait for me longer, but to set out on his expedition."

"I will convey your highness's message," replied Warthy. "But I know the king will be grievously disappointed."

"My own disappointment is greater than his majesty's can be, sir. I pray you assure him so," rejoined Bourbon.

A slightly incredulous smile passed over Warthy's shrewd features at this observation. However, he made no remark, but, taking leave of the Constable, set out on his journey, mounted on a fleet steed, which soon carried him several leagues on his way.

No sooner was Bourbon freed from the restraint imposed upon him by the importunate spy, than he commenced preparations, and despatched a body of men with arms and ammunition, under the command of Captain Saint-Saphorin, to his château of Chantelle, instructing them to put that fortress at once into a state of complete defence.

"I shall be there myself in a few days," he said

to Saint-Saphorin. "Moulins, I find, is quite untenable."

This state of repose was not of long continuance. Warthy, who had been provided with relays of the fleetest horses, was back again in an incredibly short time, and Bourbon, to his infinite annoyance, was obliged to resume his couch. He received the spy in a very ill humour, but Warthy did not appear to heed his displeasure.

"Highness," he said, "the king is much offended. He will not believe you are so ill as you represent. And he commands you, on your allegiance, to join him without delay."

"That is wholly impossible, sir," interposed Jean de l'Hôpital. "The Lord Constable is far too ill to travel. I fear you have not explained fully his dangerous condition to the king."

"I have reported all I have seen," replied Warthy. "But his majesty will take no more excuses."

"Excuses, sir!" cried Bourbon, fiercely. "Dare you insinuate ——"

"I but repeat the king's message to your highness," replied Warthy. "His majesty, as I have said, is highly offended, and declares he will no longer be trifled with. He peremptorily orders you to join him at Lyons without delay. If you fail to do so ——" And he hesitated to proceed.

"Well, sir — what if I fail?" demanded Bourbon, slightly raising himself, and fixing a stern glance on the messenger.

"His majesty will send the Grand-Master and Marshal de Chabannes with three thousand lansquenets to fetch you," rejoined Warthy.

"Mort-Dieu! am I to be told this?" cried Bourbon.

And he would have sprung from the couch, if the two physicians had not thrown themselves upon him, and held him forcibly down.

"You will betray yourself if you give way thus," whispered Jean de l'Hôpital. "I pray your highness to be calm."

Yielding to the advice, the Constable controlled himself by a great effort.

There was a pause, during which the spy remained intently watching the Constable.

"What answer shall I return to his majesty?" asked Warthy, at length.

"Say I will come," replied Bourbon.

"Highness, it is not possible that you can travel," said Jean de l'Hôpital. "His majesty cannot desire your death."

"It would seem as though he did," rejoined Bourbon. "But, be the consequences what they may, I will set out to-morrow. Tell his majesty

so," he added to Warthy. "When do you return to Lyons?"

"Within an hour," was the reply. "I am charged to come back instantly, and, as I have relays of horses, I shall not be long on the road. His majesty will be well content with your highness's determination."

And, with a profound bow, he quitted the room.

"May the devil go with him!" exclaimed Bourbon, as he sprang from his couch. "If I detain this spy," he thought, "the king will execute his threat, and send the Grand-Master and Chabannes to take me. Here, in this château, I can offer no resistance, but in Chantelle I may stand a siege, and hold up till I can obtain reinforcements. I must proceed thither without delay."

As soon as Warthy had departed, a conference was held between Bourbon and his followers, in which it was agreed on all hands that it would not be safe to remain longer at Moulins, and it was therefore decided to remove to Chantelle, a fortress in Auvergne, which the Constable considered impregnable. This decision being arrived at, preparations for departure were made with all possible despatch.

Determining to take with him all his treasure and valuables, Bourbon emptied his coffers, and

caused their contents, amounting to more than thirty thousand golden crowns of the sun, to be sewn up in stout leathern bags. In like manner his jewels and other valuables were removed from their caskets, and packed up in valises. Could he have done so, he would have carried off his silver drinking-vessels and plate as well. These preparations made, the majority of the conspirators, escorted by a troop of three hundred men-at-arms, fully equipped, quitted the château at nightfall, and proceeded towards Auvergne. The bags containing the gold pieces were entrusted to veteran soldiers. The young seigneurs took charge of the jewels.

Bourbon's object being to gain time, he did not accompany the troop, but tarried till the following morning, when, pretending that he was about to join the king at Lyons, he entered his litter, and attended by his physicians, and by a small escort commanded by Pomperant, proceeded along the beautiful valley of the Allier towards La Palisse, where he rested for the night.

Next day he continued his journey across a hilly tract of country to a small town, all the time keeping close within his litter. On the third day he reached Changy, and here his physicians gave out that the journey had seriously aggravated his malady and that it was utterly impossible for him to proceed

farther at present. Bourbon's design was to wait at Changy till he could obtain intelligence of the king's movements from secret agents whom he had despatched for the purpose to Lyons.

Before these messengers could return, Warthy made his appearance at Changy, and, being informed of the Constable's increased illness, to which he attached little credence, sought an interview with him. This was granted without difficulty, and the spy found the duke in bed, with his physicians in attendance upon him.

"You see, sir," he remarked to Warthy, "I have made every effort to comply with his majesty's commands, but my strength has entirely failed me. However, I feel somewhat better to-day, and to-morrow I hope to reach Roanne. I pray you return to the king, and tell him how you have found me."

"My orders are not to quit your highness," rejoined Warthy; "and if I return without you, I am persuaded his majesty will put his threats into excution, and order your immediate arrest."

"His majesty will act as he deems best. I must decline further discourse with you," said Bourbon, turning from him.

Warthy felt almost certain he was duped by the Constable and his physicians, but as some doubts still lingered in his mind, he determined to return

to Lyons, where he arrived early next morning. From the report given him by the spy, François felt convinced of the Constable's duplicity.

"He is playing me false," he said. "But I will baffle his schemes. Return to him at once, and do not leave him again. If any further difficulties arise, despatch messengers to me, and I will send the Grand-Marshal and the Marshal de Chabannes to seize him."

IX.

Chantelle.

The indefatigable Warthy departed on his mission. On arriving at Changy his worst suspicions were verified. The sick man and his attendants were no longer there. But instead of pursuing his route towards Lyons, as he had promised, the Constable had turned back towards Moulins.

Despatching a messenger to the king with this information, Warthy rode on to La Palisse, and thence to Varennes, where, it appeared, the Constable had laid aside all disguise, and, abandoning his litter, had mounted a charger, and ridden off with his suite to the Château de la Chantelle, in Auvergne. Disregarding the risk he might incur

in following him, Warthy despatched a second messenger to the king, and started in pursuit. He was only a few hours behind the Constable, and being well mounted, hoped to overtake him before he arrived at Chantelle.

Speeding across the wide plain of the Allier, skirted on the east by the mountains of Forez, he soon reached the small town of Saint-Pourçain, where he obtained a fresh horse, and ascertained, at the same time, that the Constable and his attendants were only two or three leagues in advance of him. From Saint-Pourçain he entered the vale of the Sioule, and, pursing his course by the side of the river, soon found himself among the mountains of Auvergne.

The region he had now gained was highly picturesque, but Warthy noted little of its beauties, being engrossed by the thought of the dangerous errand on which he was bent. But, though fully aware of the risk he incurred, Warthy did not shrink from it.

After tracking the sinuous course of the river through the mountains, whose funnel-shaped cones and rifted sides proclaimed them to be extinct volcanoes, and remarking several ancient strongholds perched on commanding points, he emerged into a broad plain watered by the Sioule, whose course he

had hitherto followed. He now plainly descried the lordly château of Chantelle, about two leagues off, situated on a rocky eminence, the base of which was washed by the river. It was a vast and strongly-built fortress, and from its position seemed well capable of standing a siege.

As Warthy's eye ranged over the intervening district he caught sight of a troop of horsemen, whose arms were glittering in the sunbeams, and entertaining no doubt that the cavalcade consisted of Bourbon and his attendants, he set spurs to his charger and galloped on. But swiftly as he speeded, to overtake the Constable was now impossible, and he was still half a league off, when he beheld the train pass through the outer gates of the castle.

As he approached yet nearer to the fortress, he plainly perceived that it had been put into a state of defence, the ramparts and bastions being armed with ordnance of large size, and the towers with culverins and falconets. Sentinels were pacing to and fro on the battlements, and a guard was stationed on the outer gate. From the summit of the donjon floated Bourbon's haughty standard, which had been unfurled immediately after his arrival. The din of martial instruments resounded from the outer court of the castle, and when Warthy, after some little

delay, obtained admittance, he found the enclosure full of armed men.

Bourbon had not thrown off his riding-cloak, and was conversing with Tansannes, Saint-Saphorin, and others, in a great hall with a roof supported by rafters of chesnut, and walls adorned with trophies of the chase — huge antlers, skins of bears, wolves, foxes, wild cats, and marmots, with which the adjacent mountains abounded — when the arrival of the king's messenger was announced.

The Constable ordered him to be at once admitted, and on his appearance, said to him, in a jocular tone,

"What! here already, Messire de Warthy! You spur me hard, my friend."

"Your highness must have better spurs than mine, since you have got here first," replied Warthy, in the same tone. "I am glad to find you can ride so well. You can now have no reasonable excuse for disobeying the king's injunctions. I hope you will accompany me to Lyons."

"A truce to this, sir!" cried Bourbon, changing his manner. "I have come hither to be free from the persecution to which I have been subjected. Unless I have the king's written promise to restore me my possessions, I will not stir from this castle. If he refuses my just demand, there will be a war

in France more dreadful than any the kingdom has yet endured."

"I grieve to hear your highness threaten rebellion, for I can only so construe your words," replied Warthy, courageously. "It is not for me to predict what his majesty's reply will be to your demand, but I fancy it will be conveyed by the Grand-Master and the Marshal de Chabannes, at the head of an overwhelming force."

"I am of opinion that the king will return a very different answer, sir," said Bourbon. "He knows he has treated me unjustly, and when he finds I am in a position to obtain redress, he will offer it. But be his decision what it may, I am prepared."

"I would fain remonstrate with your highness before you take this terrible step," said Warthy. "Powerful as you are, you cannot resist the king."

"That remains to be seen, sir. I am resolved to have justice, which has been so long denied me."

"Then at the hazard of my life I must perform my duty," rejoined Warthy, boldly. "I now proclaim to all your followers that if they shall aid you in holding this castle against their sovereign lord and king, to whom, and not to you, they owe fealty and homage, they will be guilty of lèse-majesté, and will be treated as rebels and traitors."

"Will your highness allow this insolent fellow to brave you thus?" cried Pomperant, furiously. "Order his instant execution."

Warthy did not blench, though he felt he was in a most critical position.

"Remember, I am sent hither by the king," he said.

"The king cannot save you!" cried Tansannes.

"No, but he can avenge me," replied Warthy, resolutely.

"The audacious spy deserves a dog's death," cried François du Peloux. "Let him be hanged at once."

"Or flung from the battlements," said Saint-Saphorin.

"No," said Bourbon; "he has given his tongue unwarrantable license, but he has come hither as the king's messenger, and his person is safe. You must be content to remain here till to-morrow, Messire de Warthy, when you will take a letter from me to the king. The Bishop of Autun, who is here, shall accompany you, in order that he may explain my conduct to his majesty."

"I must perforce remain as long as your highness chooses," replied Warthy.

"You ought to thank me for detaining you," said Bourbon. "You must want rest after your journey.

See that all care be taken of him," he added to an attendant.

Upon this Warthy withdrew.

After inspecting the garrison, Bourbon proceeded to examine the defences of the fortress, to make sure of its capability of resisting a siege. The examination was very carefully conducted, and occupied several hours. At its conclusion, he held a private conference with all his chief adherents, at which it was unanimously agreed that the place was not strong enough to hold out against the powerful army which would infallibly be sent to besiege it by the king.

"If it should fall before I can be reinforced, my cause will be ruined," said Bourbon; "and the German lanz-knechts enrolled by the Archduke Ferdinand, though already assembled in the Franche-Comté, will not dare to enter France while the king remains at Lyons. For my own part," he continued, "I am satisfied that his majesty is too much alarmed to quit the kingdom at present, and if he should decide on crossing the Alps, he will assuredly leave behind him an army of six or seven thousand men. The presence of such a force will prevent the contemplated rising, and the nobles of Auvergne, whom I had summoned by the arrière-ban to unite at Roanne, will disperse without striking a blow. What is to be done under these cir-

cumstances? Shall we retire to Carlat? Though more inaccessible, that castle is no better able to stand a siege than the fortress we now occupy."

"To be shut up amid the mountains might be fatal," remarked Tansannes. "Let us make the best of our way to the Franche-Comté, where your highness can put yourself at the head of the German lanz-knechts."

"The lanz-knechts are already commanded by two able leaders, the Counts Wilhelm and Felix de Furstenberg," replied Bourbon. "I will not become a fugitive from my own territories while there is a chance of holding them. A few days will now decide. My letter, which will be conveyed to the king by Warthy, will bring the matter to a crisis. If, as I fear, his majesty should abandon his expedition to Italy, nothing will be left for us but flight."

Next day, Warthy left the castle, accompanied by the Bishop of Autun. On the farther side of La Palisse they encountered the Marshal de Chabannes and the Grand-Master, who were marching at the head of a large force, consisting of light horsemen and fantassins, to seize the Constable. On discovering this force, the bishop contrived to send off a messenger to warn Bourbon.

The bishop himself was arrested, and sent on to Lyons with a guard, under the charge of Warthy.

X.

How the Bishop of Autun and the Comte de Saint-Vallier were arrested.

On a plain, outside the fair city of Lyons, was encamped the army destined for the expedition to Italy. In the midst of the camp stood the royal tent. Thither the Bishop of Autun was taken by Warthy. François had just returned from inspecting his troops. His towering figure was sheathed in glittering steel, but he had taken off his plumed helm and given it to a page, at the moment when the bishop was brought in.

After glancing at the Constable's letter, which was delivered to him by Warthy, François tore it in pieces, exclaiming furiously, "Does the audacious traitor venture to treat me as an equal, and propose terms to me! Foi de gentilhomme! I will lower his pride. Hitherto I have acted too leniently towards him, but now he shall feel my power. I have striven to save him, but since he is insensible to my kindness, and will rush upon his ruin, e'en let him perish!"

"Your majesty forgets that you have driven the Constable to desperation," said the Bishop of Autun.

"Could he have placed faith in your promises, he would be with you now. I implore your majesty to make terms with him, and, by so doing, avoid a most disastrous war."

"My lord bishop," said the king, sternly, "I will not hear a word in the traitor's behalf. He can expect no grace from me, and, by Saint Louis! he shall have none. He thinks himself safe in Chantelle, but I will take it in a week; and if he seeks refuge in the mountains of Auvergne, I will hunt him down like a wild beast. I will proclaim him as a rebel and traitor throughout the realm, and set a price of ten thousand golden crowns upon his head. All who shall harbour him, or assist him or any of his followers, shall be held guilty of treason. And now, my lord bishop, a word with you. You are concerned in this conspiracy, and, if you would obtain grace and restoration to my favour, you will not hesitate to reveal all you know respecting it."

"I have nothing to reveal, sire," replied the bishop.

"You are the depositary of the Constable's secrets, my lord," remarked François, sternly.

"Whatever his highness may have confided to me under the seal of confession, is sacred, sire," rejoined the bishop.

"That excuse will not avail you, my lord. You

are bound to disclose a conspiracy against your sovereign. By Saint Louis! I *will* have the truth. All those who are in any way implicated in the plot, or suspected, shall be immediately arrested. One of the chief conspirators is already in my power. I will interrogate him at once. Bring the Comte de Saint-Vallier before me," he added to Warthy. "You will find him in the adjoining tent, with his daughter, the Comtesse de Maulévrier."

"Am I to arrest him, sire?" demanded Warthy.

The king replied in the affirmative, and Warthy departed on his errand, returning presently with Saint-Vallier, who was guarded by two halberdiers.

Just as François was about to interrogate the prisoner, Diane de Poitiers rushed into the tent, and threw herself at the king's feet, exclaiming:

"My father has been unjustly accused, sire. He is no traitor."

"I trust he may be able to clear himself, madame," rejoined the king, raising her gently. "But as it will be painful to you to listen to his examination, I must pray you to retire."

"You have disobeyed my injunctions in coming hither, Diane," said Saint-Vallier, reproachfully. "Your presence adds to my trouble. Go, I implore you!"

"No, no, I will not leave you," she rejoined.

"I may be able to plead your cause. I can show his majesty that he has not a more loyal subject than yourself — that you are incapable of the crime with which you are charged — and that if there should be a conspiracy headed by the Duke de Bourbon, which I cannot — will not — believe, you have no part in it."

"Can the Comte de Saint-Vallier himself give me such assurance, madame?" said the king.

"Undoubtedly, sire," replied Diane. "Speak, father! You have no share in any plot?"

"I know of no plot," rejoined Saint-Vallier. "But I am well aware that I have many enemies, who would not hesitate to accuse me falsely. Who charges me with conspiracy against your majesty?" he added to the king.

"I do," replied Warthy. "I charge you with leaguing with the king's enemies, and I will bring proof of what I assert."

"I defy you to do so," replied Saint-Vallier; "and if the combat be permitted me by his majesty, I will force you, at the point of the sword, to confess that you have accused me falsely."

"You must establish your innocence by other means than the combat," rejoined the king. "You have long been Bourbon's confidential friend and adviser. You have been staying with him at the

Château de Moulins. Is it not certain, then, that you must be privy to his designs?"

"Presumption is no proof, sire," said Saint-Vallier. "If the Constable de Bourbon has any such designs as your majesty attributes to him, he has carefully concealed them from me."

"You abuse my patience by these idle prevarications," cried the king, angrily. "By an immediate avowal of your guilt, and by a disclosure of all you know respecting this conspiracy, you might merit my forgiveness."

"And think you, sire, that if I were leagued in such a plot, I would purchase safety by betraying my associates?" rejoined Saint-Vallier. "No, I would rather perish on the scaffold."

"Such will be your fate," said the king, sternly. "But torture shall extort the truth from you."

"Oh! sire," exclaimed Diane, again flinging herself at the king's feet, "do not have recourse to such terrible measures. Spare him the torture! — spare him!"

"Let him confess his guilt, then — let him reveal all he knows regarding the plot," rejoined François.

"Torture will not force me to speak," said Saint-Vallier, resolutely. "I should be unworthy of the

name I bear if I could betray my friends. Cease to intercede for me, Diane," he added to his daughter.

"Remove the prisoners," said François to Warthy, "and let them be taken with a strong escort to Paris, and lodged in the Conciergerie, there to be kept till commissioners shall be appointed for their trial by the Parliament."

"Sire," said Diane, "I crave your majesty's permission to attend my unhappy father to Paris. My presence will be some consolation to him."

"I cannot grant your request, madame," replied the king, in an inflexible tone. "You must remain here with the Comtesse de Châteaubriand. Take leave of your father, and let him depart."

Half distracted, Diane flung herself in her father's arms. While straining her to his breast, Saint-Vallier said, in a low voice:

"Stay not here. Depart instantly for Normandy. Promise me this, and I shall die content."

"You shall not die, father," she cried. "I will obtain your pardon. I will not cease to supplicate the king till he yields."

"I forbid it," rejoined Saint-Vallier, authoritatively. "Obey me, as you would know peace hereafter."

Diane made no reply. Overcome by her emotion, she had swooned in his arms.

Female attendants were instantly summoned from the adjoining tent, which was appropriated to the Comtesse de Châteaubriand and her ladies, and Saint-Vallier having committed his daughter to the charge of these women, quitted the tent with the Bishop of Autun and Warthy.

The king's injunctions were promptly carried into effect. While the two prisoners were despatched with a guard strong enough to prevent any attempt at rescue, to Paris, and lodged in the Conciergerie, there to await their trial, officers were sent forth to all the principal towns in the Lyonnais, the Bourbonnais, Auvergne, Bourgogne, and Dauphiné, to proclaim by sound of trumpet the Constable de Bourbon a rebel and a traitor, and to offer in the king's name a reward of ten thousand golden crowns of the sun for his capture. Orders were at the same time issued that all the southern frontiers of the kingdom should be strictly guarded, so as to prevent his flight.

By such means the alarm was spread far and wide with inconceivable rapidity, and it seemed scarcely possible that Bourbon could escape.

Meanwhile, the Grand-Master and the Marshal de Chabannes had marched, without opposition, to Chantelle. There was no necessity to summon the fortress to surrender. The gates were thrown open

by Saint-Saphorin, who was left in command, on the approach of the assailants. But the Constable and his chief adherents were gone, and, as far as could be ascertained, had taken refuge amid the mountains of Auvergne. The two leaders, therefore, having compelled the garrison to lay down their arms, arrested Saint-Saphorin, took possession of the fortress in the king's name, and despatched several bodies of men in pursuit of the fugitives.

Warthy was also on Bourbon's track, having sworn to effect his capture.

XI.

Marcelline d'Herment.

Late at night, the messenger despatched by the Bishop of Autun to warn Bourbon of his danger, reached Chantelle, and before dawn the Constable had quitted the fortress, attended by his principal adherents. His escort comprised a hundred well-armed men, to twelve of whom were entrusted the leathern bags containing the treasure.

After traversing a long mountainous defile, remarkable for its grand and savage scenery, he reached Montaigut, where he dismounted, and enter-

ing the church, performed his devotions, and besought Heaven's aid in his difficulties.

Leaving Montaigut, he soon became involved in a range of volcanic mountains, and after a long ride through this extraordinary region, he came to the Château Lafayette — an old feudal stronghold, built on a vast lava current, which had issued in bygone ages from the crater of the Puy de Come.

Riding up to its gates, he was heartily welcomed by the châtelain, who hospitably entertained him and his train, cheering them with a liberal supply of the generous wine for which the district is renowned.

Lafayette would fain have persuaded Bourbon to tarry with him, but the Constable declined, alleging that he intended to pass the night at the Château d'Herment.

Again the fugitive's way led him through mountainous defiles, and night overtook him long before he reached his destination. Harbingers had been sent on to announce his approach, and as he and his followers climbed the steep and dangerous ascent to the fortress, a number of men, carrying blazing pinewood torches, issued from the gates, and lighted them on their way. At their head was the young châtelain, who greeted Bourbon with profound respect, and placed his castle and all within it at his disposal.

The Seigneur d'Herment was a young man of some two or three-and twenty — tall, powerfully built, and handsome. He was habited in a green hunting-dress and buff boots, and wore a broad-leaved grey felt hat, ornamented with a white feather, on his head. With him were two large shaggy hounds, which had pulled down many a lordly stag, torn in pieces many a wolf, had engaged more than one bear, and would not have hesitated to attack any other wild animal.

D'Herment dwelt in his lonely castle with his sister Marcelline, whose beauty and courage were the theme of admiration throughout that wild district. Marcelline was nearly five years younger than her brother, whom she strikingly resembled in feature, and even in character. Though her pursuits were masculine, and though her time was passed among horses and hounds, though she could manage a hawk better than her own falconer, though she could tire out the most energetic horseman, though she never missed the mark with arbalest or petronel, there was nothing in Marcelline's manner unbecoming the gentlest damsel. Her features, it is true, had a resolute expression, not often met with in a maiden of eighteen, her mouth and chin being proudly cut, and her fine nostrils often distended like those of a deer. Her complexion was em-

browned by the sun, her eyes large, bright, and blue, and her luxuriant tresses of a lovely auburn. Her attire, though savouring little of court fashion, and boasting few ornaments, became her well, and displayed her tall and symmetrical figure to the greatest advantage. Her black velvet toque was adorned with the plume of an eagle which she herself had shot.

Such was the damsel who greeted Bourbon and his companions as they entered the great hall of the castle. Her remarkable beauty could not fail to strike the young nobles who were now presented to her by her brother, but she seemed insensible to the admiration she excited, and entirely occupied in attending to the Duke de Bourbon, whom she conducted to the upper table. She made no apology for the repast which was set before the Constable and his followers, and, indeed, it needed none, for though the viands were homely they were abundant, and the appetites of the guests, sharpened by their long ride, enabled them to do ample justice to the substantial dishes with which the board was loaded. Moreover, the wine was excellent, and plentifully supplied.

At the close of the repast Marcelline arose, and as the Constable led her forth he thanked her for her hospitality, and bade her adieu, stating that he should depart long before daylight.

In consideration of the fatigue they had undergone, and the extraordinarily early hour at which it had been arranged that they were to depart, most of the Constable's attendants now retired to rest; but, before seeking his chamber, Bourbon had an hour's private conference with D'Herment, at which Pomperant and Tansannes were present.

Just as the castle clock struck two, torches flashed in the great court, and showed the enclosure filled with horsemen. Shortly afterwards the chief part of the Constable's adherents made their appearance, and mounted their steeds. Ere many more minutes, Bourbon, attended by the châtelain, descended into the court, muffled in a heavy riding-cloak, doubtless to protect him from the fresh morning air. After taking leave of D'Herment, and casting a hasty glance around to ascertain that the men to whom the bags of treasure had been confided were there, he rode out of the gateway, followed by his train.

On gaining the valley he struck spurs into his steed, and the whole troop proceeded at a quick pace in the direction of the Château de Carlat, whither they were bound. Thus they passed on through a wild district, the volcanic mountains looking singularly fantastic in the gloom. Bourbon rode on in front alone, and seemed buried in thought.

At last, when day began to dawn, and the cones and craters of the mountains became more distinct, the leader of the party checked his horse, and signed to the troop to halt. The order was instantly obeyed. But what was the surprise of the young seigneurs, and indeed of the whole cavalcade, when their chief facing them, and throwing aside his cloak, disclosed the features of Tansannes!

Exclamations of surprise and anger arose on all sides.

"What is the meaning of this? Where is the Lord Constable? Has he deserted us?" cried several voices.

"He is on his way to the Franche-Comté," replied Tansannes. "Instead of retiring to rest, he quitted the Château d'Herment at midnight, disguised, and attended only by Pomperant. His aim is to gain Saint-Claude with as much expedition as possible, and we are to join him there."

This announcement caused great discontent among the young seigneurs, and they gave loud utterance to their anger.

"Pardieu! the Constable has done ill to desert us," cried Peloux. "We would all have shed our last drop of blood for him. He had better have died with his friends than be captured ingloriously."

"The Constable will never be taken alive," said Tansannes.

"But he should not have left us without a word," said Saint-Bonnet. "It looks as if he could not trust us."

"He felt you would refuse to leave him," said Tansannes.

"Why, so we should," rejoined Desguières. "I, for one, would never have left him."

"It was the conviction that a large escort must necessarily increase his risk, that caused him to abandon you," said Tansannes. "But he trusts you will rejoin him at Saint-Claude. He confides his treasure to your charge."

"Nothing, then, is left us but to cry '*Sauve qui peut*,' and disperse," said Peloux. "Let each man make the best of his way to the frontier."

"Agreed," replied the others.

"Saint-Claude must be our rendezvous," said Tansannes. "A week hence, if all be well, we will meet there. Vive Bourbon!"

"Vive Bourbon!" exclaimed the others, and the shout was ochoed by the whole troop.

The young seigneurs then bade each other adieu, and rode off in different directions, each taking with him a bag of gold, and a guard of a dozen soldiers.

XII.

The Château de Lallières.

NOTWITHSTANDING what Tansannes had asserted, Bourbon had not quitted the Château d'Herment, but had remained in his chamber while his followers rode away. The only persons taken into his confidence besides the châtelain, were Pomperant and Tansannes, the former of whom remained to attend his lord and aid his escape, while the latter undertook to personate him. The Constable was loth to separate from his devoted followers, but D'Herment convinced him that if he retained so numerous a suite he would inevitably be tracked and captured. In this opinion Tansannes and Pomperant concurred, and at last Bourbon yielded to their arguments. It was also thought advisable, for greater security, that the Constable should disguise himself as a serving-man, and for this purpose a doublet and hose of russet serge were procured for him. A short mantle of knitted worsted, with a hood attached to it, enabled him partially to conceal his features.

All being arranged, after an early meal D'Herment rode forth from his castle, with the ostensible

purpose of trying some newly-manned hawks. He was accompanied by his sister and Pomperant, and the trio were followed by Bourbon, disguised as before mentioned, and by a couple of falconers, each having a hawk upon his wrist.

After more than an hour's ride among the mountains, they came to a lake formed by the damming up of a river by a tremendous stream of lava which had flowed from the side of a lofty volcanic mountain.

The lake was of some extent, and its borders were in places fringed by trees, while the shallower parts were full of reeds, bulrushes, and aquatic plants Marcelline now took a hawk from one of the falconers, and a heron shortly afterwards rising from the reeds, she quickly unhooded the hawk, and cast it off. On perceiving its danger, the heron flew swiftly upwards, followed with equal swiftness by the hawk, and to such a height did they soar, that they looked like specks, and eventually almost vanished from sight. When they reappeared, the hawk was uppermost, and soon stooped upon her prey, and ere another minute the heron fell dead within a few yards of Marcelline.

A bittern was next roused, but the party were prevented from continuing the sport by the appearance of a troop of horsemen coming from the direc-

tion of the château. No doubt could be entertained that this troop, which consisted of a dozen men and a captain, were in pursuit of the Constable. There was no time for deliberation, but Marcelline was equal to the emergency.

"Ride on with the prince," she said to her brother. "Let the Seigneur Pomperant go with me. They will take him for the Constable. We can make our way across the mountains to the Château de Lallières. If you can baffle pursuit, you will find us there."

To this bold proposition D'Herment at once agreed, and the courageous damsel, calling upon Pomperant to follow her, dashed up the rugged side of the mountain. At the same moment, D'Herment, followed by Bourbon and the falconers, galloped off along a road which skirted the banks of the lake.

The movements of the parties were of course descried by Captain Florac, the leader of the troop. As had been foreseen by Marcelline, he mistook Pomperant for Bourbon, and started in pursuit with a couple of men, despatching the rest of the troop after the other fugitives. While mounting the hill, Marcelline and her companion remained in sight of their pursuers, but soon after gaining the summit they were lost to view.

On reaching the same point, Florac found that

they were descending a precipitous road into the valley on the opposite side of the mountain, and, notwithstanding the danger of the course, he unhesitatingly followed with his men, and reached the valley in safety.

The chase continued for more than a league along a narrow defile, when all at once Marcelline and her companion stopped, and, on seeing this, Florac pressed on more vigorously than ever.

The stoppage of the fugitives had been caused by the appearance of a body of armed men riding towards them from the farther end of the defile. Uncertain whether these were friends or foes, but fearing they might prove the latter, Pomperant hesitated to proceed, halting for a brief space to consider what course he should pursue.

Marcelline proposed to take refuge in the fastnesses of the mountains, and undertook to guide him to a secure retreat, and, without waiting for his reply, forced her horse up a steep acclivity. Pomperant followed, but, ere he had climbed half the ascent, Florac and his men came up, and two shots were fired, one of which struck Pomperant's horse, and the wounded animal, after a plunge and a struggle, rolled down the precipice, dragging his rider with him.

Pomperant, though much bruised, tried to disen-

gage himself, but, ere he could do so, Florac had dismounted, and holding him down, presented a poniard at his throat.

"I arrest your highness in the king's name," cried Florac. "You are my prisoner."

"Why do you address me by that title?" demanded Pomperant. "For whom do you take me?"

"For Charles de Bourbon, Constable of France, a rebel and a traitor to the king," rejoined Florac. "Fortune has, indeed, favoured me. I shall obtain then ten thousand gold crowns offered by his majesty for your highness's capture."

"You will obtain no reward for my capture," said Pomperant. "I am not Bourbon."

"This denial will not avail with me, prince," rejoined Florac. "I know you too well. Yield yourself my prisoner, or ——"

"Never!" exclaimed Pomperant, seizing his antagonist's wrist, and preventing him from using the poniard.

A desperate struggle then ensued between them. Florac was a very powerful man, and, being uppermost, had a great advantage over Pomperant, who, moreover, could not extricate himself from his horse.

The issue of the conflict could not therefore be

doubted, especially as the troopers were preparing to aid their leader, when at this juncture a sharp report was heard from above. A well-directed bullet pierced Florac's brain, and he sank an inert mass upon Pomperant's breast.

Looking up, the troopers perceived Marcelline on the edge of a rock, with a smoking petronel in her hand.

The fate of their leader caused a momentary irresolution in the men, and this allowed Pomperant time to free himself from his dead antagonist and spring to his feet. In another moment he had possessed himself of Florac's steed, and, charging the troopers, hewed down one of them. Panic-stricken, the other galloped off, but he did not escape. Pomperant rode after him, and being better mounted, speedily came up with him, and by a tremendous blow cleft him almost to the girdle.

The poor wretch had ridden in the direction of the troop, whom we have described as advancing along the ravine, and who were now not far from the scene of action, hoping they might succour him — but he shouted to them in vain. Had they been so minded, they could not have lent him aid, but they might have avenged him, for the victor did not attempt to fly, but tranquilly awaited their coming up. Pomperant anticipated no molestation, for

he had recognised in the leader of the troop a friend — the Seigneur de Lallières.

Meanwhile, Marcelline had descended from the heights, and riding up, received Pomperant's congratulations on the courage she had displayed. While thanking her for the important service she had rendered him, he added, with a look that bespoke the depth of his gratitude, "You have saved my life. I shall never forget the debt I owe you."

A greeting then took place between Pomperant and Lallières, and after explanations had been given by the former, Lallières ordered half a dozen of his retainers to convey the bodies of Florac and the two troopers to a monastery in the mountains, and there cause them to be interred, taking care to have masses said for their souls.

The château belonging to Lallières proved to be about three leagues off, and on arriving at it, he consigned Marcelline to the care of his wife, and then taking Pomperant to his own private chamber, proceeded to anoint his bruises with a sovereign balsam, which he affirmed would speedily heal them, and which afforded the sufferer almost immediate relief. Lallières then left his guest, but presently returned with his intendant, an old and trusty servant, who brought with him a basket containing cold viands and wine. Having satisfied his hunger,

Pomperant threw himself on a couch, and, being much fatigued, slept soundly for several hours, when he was awakened by the opening of the chamber-door, and by the light of a silver lamp burning on the table, beheld his host, who was accompanied by the Constable and D'Herment. Bourbon informed his follower that he and D'Herment had only just reached the château, having been compelled to take a circuitous road among the mountains, in order to elude their pursuers; and he added, that it would be necessary to depart before daybreak, as the château was certain to be visited in the morning by some of the numerous bands of armed men scouring the country.

"I am ready to set out now, for the few hours' sound sleep I have enjoyed have completely restored me," said Pomperant. "But your highness has been in the saddle since early morning, and must need rest."

"I need meat and drink more than rest," replied Bourbon. "D'Herment and I have fasted more rigorously than hermits throughout the day."

"In an hour I shall be ready," added D'Herment. "I cannot engage to satisfy my appetite in less than that time. I never felt the pangs of hunger so keenly as now."

"You shall have wherewithal to allay them, I

promise you," observed Lallières. "Come with me to the banqueting-hall."

"Nay, there is plenty here," said Bourbon, glancing at the viands left on the table by Pomperant. "Fall to without ceremony, I pray you," he added to D'Herment. "Regard me only as your comrade, not as your prince."

They then sat down and attacked the provisions with great vigour. Seeing the havoc they were making, Lallières sought a fresh supply of meat and wine, and it was well he did so, for the appetites of his guests appeared insatiable. At length, however, they declared themselves satisfied, and arose from the table.

"I think your highness need not depart till morning," said Lallières; "but if you are resolved to go, I will order horses for you."

"Do so, my good friend," replied Bourbon. "If I remain, my retreat may be cut off."

Lallières then quitted the chamber to give the necessary orders, and Bourbon was discussing his route with the others, when their host reappeared, his looks proclaiming alarm.

"What has happened?" demanded the Constable.

"The Seigneur Perot de Warthy is at the castle gate and demands admittance in the king's

name," replied Lallières. "He has a troop of archers with him."

"Warthy here!" exclaimed Bourbon, turning pale. "Then there is good reason for apprehension."

"How will your highness have me act?" said Lallières. "You have only to command. I am ready to lay down my life for you. Shall I refuse him admittance?"

"No," replied Bourbon, after a moment's reflection. "Escape would then be impossible. I know the man. He will post himself before the castle, and allow no one to pass forth from the gates. Admit him. You can find some place of concealment for us."

"Easily," replied Lallières. And touching a spring in the oak wainscoting a secret panel flew open, disclosing a narrow passage constructed within the wall. "That passage will lead you to a chamber known only to myself and my intendant, where you will be perfectly safe. I will come to you anon."

"Enough," replied Bourbon. And, taking up the lamp, he passed through the secret door with the others.

Lallières then summoned the intendant, and bidding him remove all evidences of the repast, de-

scended to the outer court, and ordered the gates to be thrown open.

Warthy rode into the court-yard at the head of his troop, and dismounting, said, in a stern authoritative voice to the châtelain, "I require the keys of the castle to be delivered to me."

"By what right do you make the demand?" rejoined Lallières.

"As the king's representative," replied Warthy.

The keys were then brought him by the warder, and having seen the gate locked, and placed two of his own men on guard beside it, he thrust the bunch of keys in his girdle, and returned to Lallières, by whom he was conducted to a large hall on the ground floor. The attendants kept at a respectful distance, so that what passed between them was unheard.

"Seigneur de Lallières," said Warthy, "I have reason to believe that the arch-traitor, Charles de Bourbon, has sought shelter beneath your roof. Those who screen him share his guilt. Deliver him up, and I will save you from all ill consequences. Attempt to shield him from justice, and you will incur the severest displeasure of the king."

"Search the castle, and if you find the prince, take him," replied Lallières, sternly.

"Then you do not deny that he is here?" said Warthy.

"I neither deny it, nor admit it," rejoined Lallières. "Search the castle, I say. I shall not hinder you. I have no other answer to make."

"Your answer is insolent, seigneur, and shall be reported to the king," said Warthy.

"Be it so," rejoined Lallières.

Warthy called the intendant, whom he recognised by his wand, and ordered him to conduct him over the castle. The old man did not dare to refuse compliance. But though the châtelain's private room was visited in the course of the perquisition, no discovery was made.

"Are you satisfied, sir?" inquired Lallières, as Warthy returned to the hall, after his unsuccessful search.

"I am satisfied that Bourbon is hidden somewhere in the château," replied Warthy, "but he shall not escape me. To-morrow I will institute a more rigorous search. I understand you have some guests in the château. Where are they?"

"The only person now here is the Demoiselle Marcelline d'Herment," replied Lallières. "The others are gone."

"Who are gone?" demanded Warthy.

"Those you seek. They departed on foot."

"At what time?" said Warthy.

"Scarce half an hour before your arrival," returned Lallières. "I counselled them not to stay, and I am thankful they took my advice."

"Was Bourbon one of them?" demanded Warthy.

Lallières remained silent, and Warthy repeated the question yet more authoritatively.

"I refuse to answer," replied the châtelain. "I have said that the persons who came hither are gone. That is all I choose to tell you. Follow them, if you think proper, or remain here. You do not expect me to put you on their track."

"You are bound to aid in capturing rebels and traitors," rejoined Warthy. "But I will not talk longer with you now. To-morrow I shall have more to say."

"To-morrow I will speak freely," returned Lallières, "for then my friends will be out of your reach. Meantime, it shall not be said that I neglected the rites of hospitality. Will you sup before you retire to rest? — or shall my intendant conduct you at once to a sleeping-chamber?"

"I do not mean to retire to rest," replied Warthy. "I shall visit the guard in person throughout the night, to assure myself that strict watch is kept. Let supper be served here."

Lallières then withdrew. Left alone, Warthy took a few turns in the great hall, and then flung himself into a chair. While doing so, he found that the keys incommoded him, so, removing them from his girdle, he laid them upon the table.

Presently afterwards a chamberlain appeared, followed by four serving-men, charged with the materials of a plentiful repast. While serving the dishes to Warthy, who ate all that was offered him, and emptied several goblets of wine, the chamberlain remarked the keys lying on the table, and it instantly occurred to him that he might be able to secure them.

While replenishing Warthy's goblet, he threw a napkin over the keys, and immediately afterwards took it up again so cautiously that no sound was audible, and then quitted the hall, ostensibly for the purpose of fetching another flask of wine.

Warthy was too much engaged with his repast to remark what had taken place, and he was still sedulously occupied when the chamberlain returned, bringing with him another flask of wine, and also a second bunch of keys — somewhat resembling those he had carried off — and while moving about he let them drop on the floor.

"Ha! give me those keys!" cried Warthy, angrily.

And taking them from the chamberlain, who apologised for the inadvertence, he thrust them into his girdle.

Just then Lallières entered the hall, accompanied by Marcelline.

"This lady has desired me to bring her to you, sir," said the châtelain. "She has a favour to ask of you."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Warthy, rising and bowing. "I trust it may be in my power to grant it."

"It is merely that I may be permitted to quit the castle," said Marcelline.

"Alone, fair lady, at this hour?" rejoined Warthy. "I have too much consideration for you to grant the request."

"Were I to depart alone, I should have no fear," she replied, "but I shall have three attendants with me."

"This is a stratagem to get Bourbon out of the castle," thought Warthy. "But I will defeat it, and secure my prey at the same time. When do you desire to depart?" he added to Marcelline.

"An hour hence," she replied.

"Well, you have my permission. You have three attendants, you say?"

"Yes, three," she answered. "You can see them before they quit the castle."

"Of course I shall see them," he returned. "They cannot depart till I am satisfied. Go fetch the warder," he added to an attendant.

Presently the personage in question entered the hall, and Warthy told him he had granted permission to the Demoiselle d'Herment to quit the château with three attendants.

"To-night?" asked the warder.

"Ay, to-night, at any hour she pleases," said Warthy.

The warder bowed, and retired.

"I am much beholden to you, messire," said Marcelline.

"Nay, fair lady, I am happy to oblige you," he returned, gallantly.

Marcelline then withdrew, accompanied by Lallières, both looking well pleased.

"I have him now," thought Warthy, as he was left alone. "It is needless to give any further instructions to the warder. He cannot unlock the gate without coming to me," he added, satisfying himself that the keys were safe.

He then resumed his seat and finished his repast, and when the table had been cleared by the serving-

men, he reclined back in his chair, and presently fell into a doze.

While thus slumbering, he fancied he heard the trampling of horses in the court, but he did not disturb himself on that account, as he felt certain no one could get out of the castle without his aid. After he had slumbered on for nearly two hours, he was aroused by the entrance of the warder.

"I have brought the keys, monseigneur," said the man.

"You have come for them, you mean, sirrah," rejoined Warthy, ascertaining that the bunch of keys was hanging from his girdle.

"I mean what I say, monseigneur," returned the warder, laying down the keys before him.

"What, then, are these?" cried Warthy, holding up the other bunch.

"Those are not the keys of the castle gate," returned the other.

"Ha! I have been duped!" cried Warthy, the truth beginning to flash upon him. "Answer me, villain," he roared. "You have not allowed the Demoiselle d'Herment and her attendants to depart?"

"Yes, I have. I concluded they had your lordship's full permission," replied the warder, trembling. "They brought the keys with them, and told me to unlock the gate. I am sorry if I have done wrong,

but I fully believed they had your sanction, and so did the guard, or we should have stopped them."

"Fool! idiot!" roared Warthy. "You have allowed the Constable de Bourbon to escape. How long have they been gone?"

"Upwards of an hour," replied the warder.

"Time enough to allow him to get fairly off," cried Warthy. "But I must start at once in pursuit. Order my horse instantly — instantly, d'ye hear, sirrah? — and bid twenty archers get ready to attend me. The rest will remain here."

The warder rushed forth to obey the order, and in less than five minutes Warthy had quitted the castle with twenty men.

His last words to the guard were: "Hold this castle for the king, till his majesty's pleasure shall be known, and keep the Seigneur de Lallières a close prisoner."

XIII.

The Mountain Hostelry.

Having got clear of the castle by the stratagem just described, the fugitives, apprehensive of immediate pursuit, dashed down the mountain, and, on reaching the valley, speeded along it as fast as their horses could carry them. Nor did they slacken their pace for more than an hour. They then paused to listen, but hearing nothing behind them, they went on somewhat more leisurely. They were all well mounted, for Lallières had given them the best horses in his stables.

Hitherto no plans had been fixed. Bourbon would fain have persuaded D'Herment and his courageous sister to leave him, but they refused, D'Herment insisting upon acting as the Constable's guide throughout the night, lest he might miss his way among the mountains, and fall into the hands of his enemies.

After some consideration it was decided that they should proceed to the Château de Montbrison, which could be reached by daylight, and where Bourbon might halt, if circumstances permitted, for a brief space, and then continue his course towards the south.

With this design, the party journeyed throughout the night, and, after crossing a chain of mountains just as day began to dawn, came in sight of the ancient towers of Montbrison.

Bourbon's purpose, however, of sheltering himself in the castle, was at once abandoned as he perceived a large troop of armed men, numbering three or four hundred, riding towards Montbrison through the valley. Evidently, the leader of this troop was about to take possession of the fortress, and it was fortunate for the Constable that he was outside its walls.

Under these circumstances, it would have been dangerous for D'Herment and his sister to proceed thither, so the party still kept together, but as their horses were dead beaten, it was absolutely necessary to give the wearied animals rest. The fugitives were therefore compelled to enter a small village among the mountains, where a hostelry promised them all they required.

The little inn was kept by an old couple and their son, Hugues. The latter took charge of the horses, while the old man and his wife attended to their guests, and quickly set before them the best their house afforded. Bourbon having to support the character of a servant, went with Hugues to the

stable, and, on entering it, was glad to perceive several strong horses in the stalls.

"My master wants to reach Vienne without delay, friend," he said to Hugues, "and I am sure he would be glad to hire horses from you to proceed thither."

"Your master shall have the horses, sir," replied Hugues, showing by the profound respect of his manner that he had recognised the person who addressed him. "If you desire it," he added, significantly, "I will go with you myself to Vienne."

"I perceive you know me, friend," rejoined Bourbon, "so I will not attempt further concealment with you. You are aware of the peril in which I am placed?"

"I am aware that ten thousand golden crowns of the sun are offered for your highness's capture," replied Hugues; "but were the reward ten times as great, it would not tempt me to betray you. I am sorry to see your highness here. I hoped you were already out of France."

And he then proceeded to explain to the Constable that the whole country was alarmed by the royal proclamations, and that a large body of men had just passed through the valley from Lyons to take possession of Montbrison.

"I saw them," replied Bourbon. "But do you

think there is danger in proceeding to Vienne? I want to get across the Rhône."

"I know not how to advise your highness," said Hugues. "The shortest road out of France is the safest you can pursue. By the time you have breakfasted, the horses shall be ready, and you can then go whithersoever you list."

Bourbon then returned to the hostel, and, sitting down at a table apart from the others, a modest repast was set before him by the old dame. Impatient to be gone, as soon as he had despatched his breakfast the Constable went forth again, and found that the horses were in readiness. By this time the old host had learned who was his guest, and professed as much devotion for him as his son had done.

"I only wish I could attend your highness in person," said the old man. "But take my son with you — take my horses — and may Heaven guard you on your way!"

"I shall not forget your zeal, my good friend," replied Bourbon, much moved; "and I trust I shall one day be able to requite you."

During breakfast, it had been arranged that the party should now separate. D'Herment and his sister proposed to return to their château, while the Constable and Pomperant resolved to make the best of their way to Vienne.

Hasty adieux were exchanged at the door of the little hostelry.

"Farewell, prince!" said Marcelline to Bourbon. "May you re-enter France at the head of an army! It will give me new life when I hear you have crossed the frontier."

"Have no fear for me," rejoined Bourbon. "Rest assured that I shall baffle my enemies. But I trust you may not suffer for your zeal in my behalf."

"If the king should imprison me and my brother, your highness must come and deliver us," she replied.

"That I engage to do," replied Bourbon.

The parting between Pomperant and Marcelline was brief, but it was evident that the former felt it deeply. The young seigneur had already become passionately enamoured of the fair damsel who had saved his life.

"Farewell, Marcelline," he said. "We shall meet again."

"I trust so," she replied.

Bourbon did not attempt to mount till Pomperant was in the saddle, but as soon as his supposed master had ridden off, he followed with Hugues.

Often and often did Pomperant turn to gaze at Marcelline, till her figure was lost in the distance.

XIV.

The Mill at Saint-Simphorien.

Compelled to avoid the public roads, the fugitives, on reaching the valley, traversed an extensive marshy plain, which would have been impassable without a guide, forded the Loire about half a league above Montrond, and after a toilsome journey through a wild and mountainous district, drew near Saint-Simphorien about an hour before midnight. As they could not put up at an auberge, Hugues proposed that they should seek a lodging at a mill which he pointed out on an eminence a short distance from the road.

"I think Maître Benoit, the miller, will take us in," he said. "He is kind-hearted and hospitable, and his daughter Madelon is the prettiest girl in Saint-Simphorien, and as good as she is pretty."

"You know her?" said Bourbon.

"I persuade myself I do," replied Hugues. "I have given my heart to her keeping, and hope one day to make her my wife — that is, if we can obtain Benoit's consent to the marriage."

"In that case we will go to the mill," said Bourbon. "You can answer for the miller's daughter, if not for the miller and his wife."

"I can answer for all three," replied Hugues. "I will stake my life that your highness shall be safe at the mill — provided we can only get in; and what is more, we shall have a good stable for the horses."

They then rode towards the mill. Close beside it was Benoit's dwelling — a substantial-looking tenement, which showed he must have thriven in his trade. A little to the rear of the house were a large barn and stable.

As the party approached the miller's abode, the alarm was given by the barking of a couple of fierce dogs in the stable-yard, and just as Hugues, who had dismounted for the purpose, was about to knock against the door with his whip, a chamber window was opened, and Benoit, thrusting forth his head, which was adorned with a tall bonnet de nuit, called out in a gruff voice:

"Hola! my masters, what do you mean by disturbing honest folk at this time of night? Go about your business."

"Our business is to procure a lodging beneath your roof, père Benoit," rejoined Hugues. "Don't you know me, my good friend?"

"What! is it Hugues?" cried the miller. "What brings you here, boy, and who have you got with you?"

At this juncture, Pomperant thought proper to interpose, declaring he was a captain of the royal guard of archers, on the way to Vienne, to intercept the flight of the Constable de Bourbon.

The explanation did not appear very satisfactory to honest Benoit, for he rejoined in a sullen tone:

"Pardieu! I shan't disturb myself for you, captain. You must go to the auberge. Good night!"

And he was about to shut the casement, when Hugues called out to him:

"Hold! père Benoit. You are mistaken. We are all friends of the Duke de Bourbon."

"Since you give me that assurance, Hugues, I am content," said the miller. "But no enemy of Bourbon shall set foot in my dwelling, if I can prevent it."

"By Saint Louis! I am glad to hear you say so, good Benoit," cried the Constable. "Admit us without fear. Bourbon has no better friend than myself."

"That voice!" exclaimed Benoit. "Oh, if it should turn out to be the Constable in person!"

"You have not made a bad guess, père Benoit," rejoined Hugues. "Come down as quickly as you can, and, meantime, let me have the key of the stable."

"Here it is," replied the miller, throwing him the key from the window. "But wait till Madelon can go with you, for the dogs are loose."

"Oh, I'll wait. I don't want to be torn in pieces," said Hugues, laughing, as he picked up the key.

Benoit then disappeared, and his voice was subsequently heard from within calling to his wife and daughter to get up immediately. Madelon was already astir, having recognised her lover's voice, and ere many minutes opened the door, and as she held a light in her hand, it could be seen that Hugues had not overrated her beauty. Nothing daunted by the presence in which he stood, her lover clasped her in his arms, and snatched a few hasty kisses. Disengaging herself as quickly as she could from his embrace, the blushing damsel turned to the others, both of whom had dismounted and fastened their horses to a rail, and begging them to enter, ushered them into a large plainly-furnished but comfortable-looking room. At the same moment, the miller and his wife, each carrying a light, came down

an oak staircase which communicated with the rooms above.

Feeling that disguise was unnecessary, and that he could safely trust the worthy miller, Bourbon had removed his hood, and no sooner did Benoit look upon him than he exclaimed:

"Ay, there stands the Duke de Bourbon. I knew his voice the moment I heard it. Look, wife, 'tis he! —'tis his highness!"

So saying, he threw himself at the Constable's feet, and his dame followed his example. So demonstrative were they in their devotion, that Bourbon could scarcely persuade them to rise. When they regained their feet, Madelon came forward to pay him like homage.

"No, no, that must not be, my pretty damsel," said Bourbon, checking her. And he added, with a smile, "Go with Hugues to the stable. He needs your protection from the dogs."

"Ay, take a lantern and go with him, Madelon," said her father. "Show him where to find food for the horses."

As the young couple departed, the miller's wife, Margot, a comely, middle-aged woman, threw a heap of wood on the hearth, and in a few minutes a blazing fire cast a cheerful glow around. While she was thus employed, an active-looking female

servant, about Madelon's age, and not without some pretension to good looks, tripped down the staircase, and hastened to spread a snow-white cloth upon the table, and make other preparations for supper. Babet, for so she was named, took Bourbon for a serving-man, and would have assigned him a place at the lower end of the table, but her mistress soon set this matter right, and ere long the two fugitives were seated opposite each other, discussing a very substantial repast.

By this time Madelon and Hugues had returned from the stables, and the young man took his seat at a respectful distance from his superiors. Before he had finished his supper, Babet, who had gone up-stairs with her mistress, came down again, and made the satisfactory announcement that chambers were ready for the guests, whereupon Bourbon and Pomperant immediately arose, and prepared to retire, intimating their intention of departing an hour before dawn.

The females having likewise retired, Benoit and Hugues drew near the fire, and fell fast asleep, but they were speedily roused from their slumbers by the fierce barking of the dogs. Both started to their feet in great alarm, as the trampling of horses, mingled with the clank of arms, was heard outside,

and left no doubt that a troop of cavalry was at hand.

Without a moment's delay, Benoit extinguished the lamp which unluckily had been left burning on the table, and rushed up the staircase to warn the fugitives.

In another minute a loud knocking was heard at the door, and an authoritative voice demanded immediate admittance. Hugues, however, made no reply, but reconnoitring the party through the window, perceived that it consisted of some twenty mounted men-at-arms, whose leader was knocking against the door with the handle of his sword.

"Unfasten the door instantly, I say," cried this personage, "or my men shall burst it open. Some one must be astir, for a light has just been extinguished."

"I knew that cursed light had betrayed us," groaned Hugues. "If the saints do not help us now, Bourbon will certainly be captured!"

Just then the creaking of a window on the upper floor was heard, and a voice, which Hugues recognised as that of the miller, called out, "Who are you, and what is the meaning of this disturbance?"

"I am the Seigneur Perot de Warthy," returned the officer. "I am in quest of the traitor and rebel, Charles de Bourbon. I have tracked him to this

neighbourhood, and shall search the house to see if he is concealed within it."

"Mercy on us! what is to be done?" ejaculated Hugues.

"You must look for the Constable de Bourbon elsewhere," replied Benoit, in a surly tone. "You won't find him here."

"I am by no means sure of that," rejoined Warthy. "Are you the miller?"

"I am Benoit, the miller, at your service."

"Then listen to me, Maître Benoit," continued Warthy, "and give heed to what I say. By harbouring Bourbon you incur the punishment of death, and if he is concealed within your house, and you do not at once deliver him up, I will hang you at your own threshold."

"I have nothing to fear on that score," returned the miller, resolutely.

"Bravely answered!" exclaimed Hugues. "My father-in-law that is to be is a true man. But I am afraid his courage will be severely tried anon."

"Are you going to open the door, rascal, or must I break it down?" roared Warthy. "I have been trifled with long enough."

"Have a moment's patience and I will let you in," returned Benoit.

"Be speedy, then," said Warthy. "Surround

the house," he added to his men, "and see that no one gets out at the back."

The trampling of horses, accompanied by the clanking of arms, proved that this order was promptly obeyed.

"Bourbon's only chance is gone," ejaculated Hugues.

As the exclamation was made, the miller, followed by Bourbon and Pomperant, both with their swords drawn, descended to the room. Madelon came down quickly after them.

"Pass out at this window, monseigneur," said Benoit, in a low voice to the Constable, moving towards the back of the room. "You may gain the wood at the foot of the hill."

"Have a care," whispered Hugues. "The house is surrounded by soldiers."

"Open the window at once," said Bourbon. "I will cut my way through them."

"Give me a sword, père Benoit," said Hugues.

"Here is one," rejoined Madelon, unhooking a weapon from the wall, and presenting it to him.

"Stay a moment, monseigneur," said Benoit. "A plan occurs to me. I should have thought of it before, but I am so bewildered. Underneath this room there is a vault where I store my corn before grinding it. Will it please you to hide there?"

"If the retreat should be discovered, we shall be caught like rats in a trap, and can offer no defence," objected Bourbon.

"My father has not explained that there is a communication between the vault and the mill," interposed Madelon. "Your highness can get out that way, should it be necessary."

"The entrance to the vault is there — under the staircase," urged the miller. "Madelon will conduct your highness. Lift the trap, girl — lift it quickly," he added to his daughter.

The trap-door was soon opened by Madelon, who descended by means of a ladder into the vault, and was instantly followed by the fugitives, the trap-door being shut by Hugues, who went down last.

Scarcely had they disappeared, when the outer door was burst open with a tremendous crash, and Warthy, sword in hand, and followed by four men-at-arms, rushed into the house. Alarmed by the noise, Margot and Babet hurried down the staircase, bearing lights, both screaming loudly as they perceived Benoit upon his knees before Warthy, who held a sword to his throat. Flying towards them, and kneeling to Warthy, Margot besought him, in piteous terms, to spare her husband's life.

"Harm him not, and I will tell all," she cried, almost frightened out of her wits.

"Speak out then at once, woman," said Warthy. "Where is the traitor Bourbon hidden?"

"Hold your tongue, wife, I command you," said the stout-hearted miller.

"But I can't stand by and see your throat cut, Benoit," she rejoined. "I must speak."

"Certainly you must, unless you desire to become a widow," said Warthy. "You may as well confess that Bourbon is here. Your looks betray you. He cannot escape, for the house is surrounded, and I don't mean to leave a hole or corner unvisited. Where is the traitor, I say?"

"Where is he, Benoit?" she cried, appealing to her husband. "For my sake, don't sacrifice yourself."

"Woman, you have lost your senses," said the miller, angrily. "What do I know about the Duke de Bourbon?"

"You know a great deal more than you appear inclined to tell, rascal," rejoined Warthy. "But I will have the truth from you. I give you five minutes for consideration," he added, releasing him, "and if at the end of that time Bourbon be not forthcoming, I will execute my threat, and hang you at your own door."

Without another word, he took the light which Margot had set down upon the table, and, signing

to two of his men to follow him, ascended the staircase. In less than five minutes he came down again, his countenance betraying anger and disappointment.

"Well, have you found him?" inquired Benoit, who had not been allowed to exchange a word with his wife during Warthy's absence.

"Not yet, but I soon shall," replied Warthy. "He has only just left his couch. Now, madame," he continued, in a stern tone, to Margot, "do you desire to see your husband hanged?"

"Oh no, monseigneur! I would rather you hanged me than Benoit."

"Nonsense! I don't hang women. Speak! or my men will take your husband forth. Where is Bourbon hidden?"

"I can't tell," she sobbed. "But if he is hidden anywhere, it must be in — in — the vault."

"A plague upon your mischievous tongue!" cried her husband, reproachfully.

"Don't blame me, Benoit," she cried. "I couldn't bear to see you hanged."

"At last we have got the truth," muttered Warthy. "I knew the woman wouldn't hold out. Show me the way to the vault, madame."

"I forbid you," said Benoit, authoritatively.

"Take care what you are about, sirrah," cried

Warthy; "you will only make your own position worse. Now, madame!"

At this moment the trap-door, which had been elevated a few inches so as to allow the person beneath it to overhear what was going on in the room, suddenly fell with a clap, that attracted the attention of Warthy.

Snatching up the light, he flew in the direction of the noise, and instantly detected the trap-door. "Soh! I have found it!" he exclaimed. "Here is the entrance to the vault. Open this trap-door," he added to his men.

The order being promptly obeyed, Madelon was discovered standing on the upper steps of the ladder.

"A woman!" exclaimed Warthy, surprised. "And, by my faith, a very pretty one, too! Take care, mademoiselle! My men are coming down into the vault to look for your companions."

"Let me come up first," she rejoined, placing herself in the mouth of the trap, so as to obstruct the descent of the soldiers. "It will be useless for you to search the vault. You will find no one there."

"I shan't take your word for that, mademoiselle," rejoined Warthy. "Make way. My men *must* go down."

Madelon was obliged to obey, and the four soldiers instantly descended.

In another minute, Warthy, who was listening anxiously, heard shouts and the noise of a struggle within the vault, and he called to know whether Bourbon had been captured.

"Yes, we've caught him," replied a soldier from below.

"Well done, my brave fellows!" cried Warthy. "You shall be handsomely rewarded. Bring him up at once."

"Fear nothing, father," said Madelon, noticing the miller's consternation. "It is not the Constable."

"Heaven be praised for that!" exclaimed Benoit.

A man-at-arms now ascended from the vault. After him came the captive, and then the three other soldiers.

"Why, this is not Bourbon!" cried Warthy, regarding the prisoner.

"I told your men so, captain," replied Hugues — for it was he — "but they wouldn't believe me."

"Go down again instantly, and make further search," roared Warthy. "He is there."

"There was no one in the vault but this man, whom we took to be Bourbon in disguise," replied one of the soldiers.

"Has the vault an outlet?" demanded Warthy.

"Oh yes," returned the soldier, "there is a door at the farther end, but it is locked."

"Then I have lost my prize," cried Warthy. "He has escaped. You shall be hanged, rascal, for assisting the traitor," he added, furiously, to Hugues.

"Give me my life, captain, and I'll tell you where to find him," rejoined the prisoner.

"If you utter a word, you need think no more of me, Hugues," said Madelon.

"Heed her not, fellow," said Warthy. "Better lose your mistress than your life."

"I am quite of your opinion, captain," rejoined Hugues. "I don't like the thought of a halter. On the understanding, then, that I am to be spared ——"

"Recollect what the consequences will be," interrupted Madelon.

"Avoid the rope, if you are wise," said Warthy.

"I mean to do so, captain," replied Hugues. "His highness the Constable and his companion have taken refuge in the mill."

"Miserable craven!" exclaimed Madelon, scornfully. "Hanging is too good for you."

"If you have misinformed me, you know the fate that awaits you," said Warthy to Hugues. "To the mill!"

Just as he was about to quit the house, a sudden glare filled the room, rendering every object as visible as it would have been in broad day. No doubt could exist as to the cause of this illumination.

"Gracious Heavens! the mill is on fire!" exclaimed Benoit.

The shouts of the men-at-arms outside confirmed the truth of the ejaculation, and the guard stationed at the door vociferated,

"The mill is on fire, captain!"

"Take care no one escapes from it," roared Warthy, in reply.

"Powers of mercy! what an accident!" exclaimed Hugues, his countenance reflecting the horror depicted on the faces of all around. "The Constable de Bourbon will be burnt to death!"

"No, no, he won't," cried Warthy, who remained perfectly calm, even at this exciting moment. "But he will be forced out of his hiding-place."

On this he quitted the house with his men, leaving a guard outside the door.

No sooner was he gone than Hugues went up to the miller, who looked almost stupified, and clapping him on the shoulder, said, with a grin,

"I set the mill on fire, père Benoit."

"You did!" exclaimed the miller; "a nice piece

of work you've done. And you make a joke of it, rascal — you laugh."

"Laugh! to be sure. And so will you, père Benoit, when you know why I set it on fire."

"Mother of Heaven! how it burns!" exclaimed Margot, as the glare momentarily increased in brilliancy, and the roaring of the flames and the crackling of the timber could be distinctly heard.

"My poor old mill!" cried Benoit, in a despairing voice. "I shall never behold it again!"

"Cheer up, father," said Madelon. "I told Hugues to set fire to it — indeed, I helped him."

"What! you have assisted to make me a beggar, and then bid me cheer up!" cried the miller.

"The loss of the mill won't make you a beggar father. I know better than that," she rejoined. "I felt sure you wouldn't mind any sacrifice to save the Duke de Bourbon."

"That I shouldn't!" exclaimed Benoit. "But how will the burning of my mill save him? Mercy on us! how the flames roar!"

"I like to hear them roar," said Madelon. "And I'm glad the fire burns so furiously. It will distract the soldiers, and enable the Constable and the Seigneur Pomperant to get off unobserved."

"Heavens! they are not in the mill?" exclaimed Margot.

"No, they are at the stable, I hope, by this time," rejoined Madelon. "How lucky it was, Hugues, that I shut up the dogs."

"If we can only get out the horses, all will be well," he replied. "I must be off to the stable. Good night, père Benoit! I hope soon to bring you good tidings."

"You can get away safely now," said Madelon, cautiously opening the back window. "There is no one here now, and the smoke will hide you."

Despite the danger, Hugues snatched a parting kiss from his charmer's lips, and then sprang through the window.

The burning mill formed a magnificent spectacle, being now wrapped in flames from top to bottom, while blazing flakes fell from the sails. Having highly combustible material to deal with, the fire had made rapid progress. Fortunately the dense volume of smoke that arose from the blazing structure was carried by the wind in the direction of the stable, and the vapour served to screen Hugues from the observation of the men-at-arms, who were all collected round the mill. Amongst them Hugues descried Warthy, and heard him exclaim, in a loud and angry voice, that he was certain Bourbon was not in the mill.

"Had he and his companion been there, they

must have come forth," he said. "They would never submit to be roasted alive."

Not a moment was to be lost. Hugues hurried off to the stable, and was rejoiced to find, on reaching it, that Bourbon and Pomperant were already mounted. His own horse was also in readiness, and he was no sooner in the saddle than the party galloped off.

They had not ridden far, however, when a loud shout, proceeding from the scene of the conflagration, proclaimed that their flight was discovered. Warthy and his men were starting in pursuit.

Sounds also arose from the little town of Saint-Simphorien, proving that its inhabitants had been roused from their slumbers by the alarm of fire, while the loud clangour of a church bell, violently rung, broke the stillness of the night.

"Poor Benoit will have plenty of help in case his house should catch fire," remarked Hugues. "All the good folks of Saint-Simphorien will be with him presently."

"Fail not to tell him I will rebuild his mill," said Bourbon.

"Your highness need not trouble yourself on that score," rejoined Hugues. "Benoit is rich enough to rebuild the mill himself. He will think nothing of the loss, provided your highness escapes."

"We must spur our horses sharply, if we would escape," cried Pomperant, looking back. "Warthy and his men are better mounted than we are, and are gaining upon us."

"But they won't catch us," rejoined Hugues. "We shall reach yonder thicket before them, and then we are safe."

"By Saint Denis, it galls me to the quick to fly thus before such caitiffs!" cried Bourbon. "Let us wait for them. That villain Warthy shall pay for his temerity."

"He *shall* pay for it, but not now," rejoined Pomperant. "On — on — for Heaven's sake! I implore your highness not to risk your life in a miserable encounter. Consider that a kingdom is at stake."

"Right," rejoined the Constable. "En avant!"

And dashing his spurs rowel-deep into his horse, he galloped swiftly on, the others keeping close beside him.

In a few minutes more the party reached the thicket in safety, and, guided by Hugues, plunged unhesitatingly into its depths.

XV.

Vienne.

All Warthy's efforts to discover the fugitives were fruitless though he sent half his men into the thicket, and continued himself to skirt it with the others till some hours after daybreak, when he gave up the quest.

He did not return to the mill, deeming that Benoit had been sufficiently punished by the destruction of his property, but shaped his course towards Vienne, under the impression that Bourbon would attempt to cross the bridge over the Rhône at that town, and, if so, he might still be able to intercept him.

In this expectation he rode on to Rive de Gier, where he halted for a while to recruit both men and horses, and at the same time instituted inquiries as to the fugitives, but could learn nothing of them. Then, crossing a mountainous ridge, in the midst of which towered Mont Pilas, he descended, towards evening, through vine-clad slopes to the lovely valley, through which rushes the broad and impetuous Rhône, hurrying on its way to the Mediterranean.

On the farther bank of the river stood the ancient and picturesque town of Vienne — ancient indeed it may well be termed, since it existed long before Lyons, and was a flourishing city in the time of the Romans, of whose occupation it still boasts many monuments.

Facing the river, which almost washed the steps leading to its grand portal, stood the Cathedral of Saint Maurice — a vast and stately pile. Behind it was grouped a multitude of buildings, remarkable for their quaint and fantastic architecture, in the midst of which rose many a lofty tower, while here and there could be discerned a Roman arch or temple, proclaiming the great antiquity of the place.

The background of the picture was formed by precipitous hills. On the summit of one of them, known as Mont Salomon, stood a strong fortress, which from its position completely commanded the valley and this part of the river. The castle was of Roman origin, the donjon being built by the first Cæsar, and, according to tradition, Pilate was imprisoned within it.

All was picturesque about Vienne — its fortified walls, its cathedral, its churches, towers, Roman monuments, and overhanging castle. But not the least striking feature was its antique stone bridge, with crenellated parapets and lofty towers. From one of

the latter, called the Tour de Mauconseil, it was said that Pilate threw himself into the river, which rushed with overwhelming force through the narrow arches of the bridge. Unluckily for the truth of the legend, the tower was built some centuries later than the event supposed to be connected with it could possibly have occurred. Notwithstanding this, the Tour de Mauconseil had an ill repute. More than once it had been struck by lightning, and no sentinel would remain on its summit during a storm.

Towards this evil tower Warthy proceeded on arriving at Saint-Colombe — as the little suburb on the right bank of the Rhône is designated. Questioning the guard stationed at the gate, he ascertained that no persons answering to the description of the fugitives had crossed the bridge on that day. Ever since the king's proclamation in regard to Bourbon's treason, strict watch had been kept, and no one allowed to pass without examination — a precautionary measure which Warthy felt certain would prevent the fugitives from attempting to cross the bridge.

On further inquiry, he learnt that lower down the river, at Ampuis, there was a ferry, which might not be guarded, and he determined to proceed thither without loss of time. Accordingly, despatching half his men across the bridge, with orders to proceed

along the left bank of the river, until they arrived opposite Ampuis, he set off with the others towards the ferry in question.

Animated by the hope of intercepting Bourbon, and dreading lest he should cross the river before his arrival, Warthy hurried on, regardless of the fatigue he had previously endured. His spirit communicated itself to his men, and they followed him without a murmur; no doubt anticipating a share in the reward.

The road pursued by Warthy was singularly beautiful, and carried him past vine-clad slopes, backed by the chain of mountains which he had just crossed. But he was insensible to the charms of the scenery, and did not even notice a lofty Roman obelisk on the opposite bank of the river. He looked only for his men, and when he saw them issue from the gates of Vienne, he was content.

Now and then he watched the turbid waters of the Rhône as they swept past him, and envied the rapidity of the current, wishing he could speed on as swiftly. But the shades of night had fallen, the mountains were shrouded, and the beauties of the banks were obscured before he approached Ampuis. Still, any object on the darkling river was discernible.

For some little time he had lost sight of the detachment on the opposite bank — the men having been forced to go inland on account of rocks and other obstacles which they encountered in their course — and he looked anxiously for their reappearance.

XVI.

The Rock in the Rhône.

Having conducted Warthy thus far, we will now see what had become of the fugitives.

Aided by Hugues, whose intimate acquaintance with the country was of the utmost service, Bourbon and his companion had managed to steal out of the thicket in which they had secreted themselves, and passing through a long ravine, had crossed the chain of mountains lying between them and the valley of the Rhône, and had descended the vine-clad slopes bordering the noble river.

They did not, however, make for Vienne — Hugues having ascertained from a peasant that the bridge was strictly guarded — but proceeded at once to Ampuis, where they hoped to cross by the ferry. Bourbon now proposed that Hugues should leave him, but the faithful fellow begged so earnestly to be allowed to go on, that at last the Constable assented.

At Ampuis, which was then, as now, renowned for its delicious wine, known as Côte Rotie, they alighted at an auberge close by the river, and obtained some refreshment, of which they stood greatly

in need, together with a flask or two of generous wine. Here they left the horses, the poor brutes being too jaded to proceed farther, and renovated by the repast, hastened to the ferry, which was at no great distance from the inn. The ferry-boat, it may be mentioned, was not rowed across the river, but being fastened by a rope to a rock in the middle of the stream, swung to and fro, like a flying-bridge. At this juncture it was chained to a post on the river-side — no passengers just then requiring to cross.

When the party approached the ferryman, it was so dark that he could not distinguish them very clearly. But he looked hard at Bourbon, and showed by his manner that his suspicions were awakened.

"We want to cross the river instantly, friend," said Pomperant.

"What am I to have?" inquired the ferryman.

"A gold crown," replied Pomperant, without hesitation.

"That's not enough," said the ferryman. "I ought to have ten gold crowns at the least."

"Well, you shall have them — but be quick," said Pomperant.

"A moment, and I'll be with you," said the ferryman, running towards the inn.

"We are discovered!" cried Bourbon. "The villain has gone for assistance. Ha! what is that?" he added, as the trampling of horses was heard.

As he looked anxiously in the direction, Warthy and his men came in sight.

"Our pursuers are at hand!" exclaimed Pomperant. "Jump into the boat at once."

In another moment all three had embarked.

The boat was large, heavy, and flat-bottomed, built to transport horses and cattle, as well as passengers, across the river. A minute or so elapsed before Hugues could unchain it, and the delay was sufficient to bring Warthy near enough to distinguish the fugitives, and at once comprehending their designs, he redoubled his speed.

"'Tis Bourbon! I see him!" he vociferated.

No sooner did the ferryman become aware of the approach of the troop, than he turned back to prevent the departure of the fugitives. But he was too late. The boat had been pushed from the strand by means of a pole which Pomperant had seized, and was swinging slowly towards the centre of the stream. But there was another boat of lighter construction and smaller size fastened to a post close by, and the ferryman busied himself in preparing it, and by the time Warthy and his men came up it was ready.

"'Tis he you seek, captain!" he cried — "'tis the Constable de Bourbon. A hundred crowns, and you shall have him."

"Thou art an extortionate knave; but I agree," replied Warthy.

Dismounting, and commanding six of his men to follow him, he sprang into the boat, which was pushed off by the ferryman. Its load, however, was too great to allow it to move expeditiously, and thus a minute or two was lost. However, there seemed little chance of escape for the fugitives, since at this moment the soldiers, tracking the left bank of the river, made their appearance, and hastened towards the landing-place of the ferry.

Nothing now remained to the fugitives, who were, of course, alive to the imminence of their peril, but to cut the rope and drop down the river. This was done, but not so quickly as could have been desired. The rope was stout, and resisted Pomperant's efforts to sever it with his poniard. While he was thus employed, several shots were fired by the soldiers, who as we have said, were riding up to the landing-place, but without effect.

As soon as it was set free the boat was carried rapidly down the river, and other shots fired at its occupants fell short of their mark. Warthy instantly followed in pursuit, and now began to regret

that his boat was overloaded, her quickness being much impeded from this cause. Nevertheless, he felt confident that his prey could not escape him. His men had their arquebuses with them, but he would not allow them to fire.

"I must take the traitor alive," he said.

Notwithstanding all the ferryman's efforts, he gained very slightly, if at all, upon the fugitives, who were swept on by the impetuous current, and for nearly half a league they kept well ahead. Any attempt to land would have been dangerous, as soldiers were riding after them on either bank, and an occasional shot warned them of their risk. It was an exciting chase, both to pursuers and pursued, and promised to become more so before it was terminated.

Hitherto, the boat containing Bourbon and his fortunes had pursued its course without encountering any obstacle, though the course of the Rhône is beset by numerous sand-banks; and Warthy had been equally lucky. But the channel was now narrowed by high rocks on either side, and thus confined, the river rushed on with the swiftness of a mill-race.

The pass was considered dangerous even by experienced boatmen, as there were many sunken rocks within it. But if the fugitives were here

exposed to a fresh peril, they escaped one to which they had hitherto been subjected, for the precipices kept the soldiers away from the river, and the firing of arquebuses ceased.

Another circumstance seemed favourable to the fugitives. Even in daytime the pass was sombre, but now it was buried in gloom. In places where the rocks overhung the river it was almost pitch-dark. Owing to this obscurity, the fugitives could no longer be distinguished, and Warthy becoming apprehensive lest they might contrive to catch at some projecting ledge of rock or overhanging tree, and allow him to shoot past them, stood up in the boat, trying to peer through the gloom, but could discern nothing save the reflexion of the stars on the darkling current. Though he listened intently, no sound met his ear except the rushing of the impetuous river.

He then ordered two of his men to discharge their arquebuses, and, by the momentary illumination thus afforded, found that his fears were not wholly groundless. But for the precaution he had taken he might have passed the fugitives unobserved. They had struck, it appeared, against a rock, which reared itself above the stream about twenty yards from the left bank, and were now vainly endeavouring to get the boat free.

Warthy instantly directed the ferryman to make for the rock, and at the same time ordered another discharge of arquebuses to guide him, reiterating his injunctions to his men that Bourbon must be taken alive.

The ferryman performed his part of the business successfully. In another moment the boat struck against the rock, and with a violence that shook her from head to stern. Both parties were now close together, and the soldiers immediately attempted to board the ferry-boat, but were beaten back with the loss of one of their number, who was wounded and thrown into the river.

In a second attempt, however, they were more successful, and the ferry-boat became the scene of a desperate conflict, in which personal strength was displayed rather than skill. Indeed, the space was so confined that swords could scarcely be used.

After a furious struggle, which endured for a few minutes, both Pomperant and Hugues were thrown down, and a general attack was made upon Bourbon, who was standing near the head of the boat.

Warthy summoned him to surrender, saying that resistance was useless, but he replied by striking down the foremost of his opponents, and the man fell overboard. Bourbon, being then hard pressed

by Warthy and two others, who turned their swords against him, sprang backwards upon the rock, which rose about a couple of feet above the water, presenting a rugged summit, on which not more than two or three persons could find standing room.

"Hold back!" cried Warthy to his men. "If we advance we shall drive him into the river, and I shall lose my prize, and you your reward. Listen to me, Charles de Bourbon," he added to the Constable. "For the last time, I summon you to surrender."

"Not while I can defend myself," rejoined Bourbon. "Come and take me. You dare not come alone."

"You are mistaken, traitor," cried Warthy, courageously. "I can capture you without assistance."

"Make good your vaunt, then," said Bourbon. "Drag me from this rock, and I will yield."

"I accept the challenge," rejoined Warthy, resolutely. "I have no fear of the issue of a conflict with a traitor. Guilt will unnerve your arm — justice will strengthen mine. Move not, I charge you," he added to his men. "Leave me to fight it out alone."

So saying, he leaped upon the rock.

Bourbon did not oppose him, but drew back slightly to give him room.

They now stood face to face, eyeing each other fiercely — the one thirsting for vengeance, the other animated with the hope of achieving a feat which would ensure him a great reward and endless renown.

"Swords are useless here," said Warthy.

"Use your poniard, then," replied Bourbon, sheathing his sword.

His example was followed by Warthy, and in another moment each held a poniard in his right hand, while with his left he grasped the corresponding hand of his adversary.

"You are a brave man, Warthy," said Bourbon, "and I am loth to kill you, but you have sought your own destruction. You will never leave this rock alive."

"I will leave it alive, and take you with me, traitor," rejoined the other.

No more was said. Each released the hand he had till that moment tightly clutched, and a terrible struggle commenced, either combatant striving, with all his force, to prevent his antagonist from using his weapon. Notwithstanding their leader's injunctions, his men would have come to his assistance, if they could have done so, but Warthy himself was

in the way, his back being towards the boat, and Bourbon could not be reached save through him.

For more than a minute the combatants remained locked in each other's embrace, unable to strike a blow. Warthy exerted all his strength to drag the Constable into the boat, but he might as well have striven to uproot an oak, or move the solid rock beneath his feet. At last, exhausted by futile efforts, he sought to extricate himself from the crushing gripe in which he was held, and partially succeeding, tried to use his poniard. But Bourbon caught his wrist as he raised the weapon, and thus had him completely at his mercy.

"Swear to take off your men and trouble me no further," said the Constable, "and I will grant you your life."

"Never!" exclaimed Warthy, again vainly struggling to get free, and calling on his men to succour him.

But, ere assistance could be rendered, Bourbon's poniard pierced his heart, and his body was flung into the rushing Rhône.

Scared by their leader's fate, the two soldiers held back for a moment, and this allowed Bourbon time to draw his sword, and successfully repel the attack made upon him.

One of his assailants was speedily sent to join

Warthy, and was swept off by the greedy current. The other retreated towards the farther end of the boat, whither he was pursued by Bourbon. His comrades, who had been occupied in guarding Pomperant and Hugues, instantly joined him, and all three attacked the Constable. But the captives being now free, the soldiers were soon overpowered. Two were slain by Bourbon, and the last was thrown overboard by Pomperant.

All Bourbon's enemies were now disposed of except the ferryman, who had taken no part in the conflict, anticipating a very different result. The man now endeavoured to push off his boat, but was prevented by Hugues, who seized the oars.

Half paralysed by terror, the miserable wretch begged his life in piteous terms, calling upon all the saints to witness that he had been an involuntary agent in the attempt at capturing the Constable, and affirming that he was delighted at its failure. His quavering tones belied his words, and, disgusted by his mendacity, Hugues would have thrown him into the river, but Bourbon interposed, offering the caitiff his life, provided he landed them safely.

All the party having embarked in the boat, it was soon set free, and in another minute the stony mass, which had been the scene of so terrible a

conflict, and which was afterwards known as "Bourbon's Rock," was left far behind.

The current bore them swiftly through the narrow pass, the river widened, the precipices disappeared, and gave way to vine-clad slopes.

Bourbon would have now landed, but he was deterred by perceiving some of Warthy's men on the left bank. Luckily, the boat escaped their notice, but mistrusting the ferryman, Hugues threatened to stab him if he made the slightest signal.

This danger avoided, they went on for two leagues farther. In passing Condrieu, then a small village, but now an important town, boasting a suspension-bridge, besides being celebrated for its wine, Hugues again enforced silence upon the ferryman, and the boat swept by unnoticed.

At length a point was reached between Le Roches and Saint-Alban, where Bourbon thought he might safely land, and he accordingly disembarked with his companions.

On leaping ashore, his first impulse was to thank Heaven for a great deliverance.

XVII.

The Inn at Saint-André.

After his narrow escape from capture by Warthy, Bourbon made his way, as well as he could, across Dauphiné, his intention being either to proceed to Italy, or shape his course to Saint-Claude, in the Franche-Comté, as circumstances might dictate. The journey had to be performed entirely on foot, since he found it impossible to procure horses, and besides undergoing great fatigue, and running constant risks, he had to submit to extraordinary hardships.

On quitting the banks of the Rhône, the fugitives, fearing they might be followed — it being certain the ferryman would give information of their route — did not dare to enter any village where there was an inn, or even seek shelter in a cottage, but avoiding all frequented roads, after a toilsome walk of more than three hours, gained a thick forest, and entering it, passed the rest of the night beneath the trees.

Next morning they quitted the forest, and feeling faint and exhausted from want of food, they

were compelled to halt at an auberge, kept by an old woman, in the outskirts of the little town of Saint-André. Astonished at the appetites of her guests, who ate with the voracity of famished wolves, the hostess did not trouble them with any questions, feeling sure she would get no response until they had satisfied their hunger. She then broached the topic on which the whole country was interested, and inquired whether the Constable de Bourbon had been taken.

"I hope not," replied Pomperant, regarding her fixedly.

"Then you are a partisan of the Constable?" rejoined the old woman.

"I won't deny it. I am Bourbon's partisan — his staunch partisan," returned Pomperant. "I hope he may give his enemies the slip — and I think he will, for I hear he is making his way through Languedoc to Narbonne, and if so, he will soon be safe across the Pyrenees."

"You have been misinformed," rejoined the hostess. "Some soldiers who were here late last night declared that Bourbon had crossed the Rhône below Ampuis."

"Diable! this is news!" exclaimed Pomperant, glancing uneasily at the Constable. "Can you tell us which way the soldiers went, dame?"

"Yes, I can satisfy you on that point," she replied. "They divided into two parties — one taking the road to Roussillon, the other to Beaurepaire. It may not please you, who have declared yourself a partisan of the Constable, to hear what I have got to say. But I believe he will soon be taken."

"Before you give a reason for that opinion, let us have some more wine, dame," said Pomperant. "Your wine is sound and wholesome."

"Better wine cannot be had in all Dauphiné," she replied, filling their cups. "Now, then, I'll tell you why I think Bourbon will be caught."

"Ay, tell us that," said the Constable, emptying his flagon.

"I think he will be taken, because he is rash and exposes himself to needless risk," said the old woman, looking hard at Bourbon as she spoke. "He is beset with dangers on all sides. The roads are guarded, and there are soldiers in every town in Dauphiné on the look-out for him. Where is he to go?"

"If he reaches the mountains, he will be safe," said Bourbon.

"Ah! but he won't reach the mountains if he comes this way," remarked the hostess.

"Why not? — they are close at hand," asked Bourbon.

"Because the provost of Vienne, with a powerful guard, is in the neighbourhood, making active search for him," said the old woman, in a significant tone; "that is why I think he will be captured."

"She warns me of my danger," thought Bourbon.

"The provost is coming hither from Eclose," pursued the hostess. "I wouldn't advise Bourbon to take that road."

"I don't think it likely he will take it, my good dame," said the Constable. "Depend upon it, he will go in quite another direction."

"In which direction can he go?" said the hostess. "I tell you, there are soldiers on every road."

"But there is a cross-road to the mountains," remarked Hugues.

"True, if he could only find it," she rejoined.

"I know it," said Hugues. "Have you any horses, hostess?"

"I have, but I cannot spare them."

"You mean, you dare not let us have them."

"As you will. But you won't get horses in Saint-André, and I advise you not to stay longer than you can help in the neighbourhood."

"We will follow your counsel, good dame," said Pomperant, as he and Bourbon rose from the table,

and prepared for immediate departure. "Thanks for our entertainment," he added, giving her a gold crown.

"This is too much," she said.

"Keep it, it will bring you luck," said the Constable. "If Bourbon comes back, show it to him."

"Ah! I dread his coming back!" she exclaimed. "They say if Bourbon escapes, he will return at the head of an army of English and Spaniards, and slaughter us all, like so many sheep."

"His enemies say that of him," rejoined the Constable. "Hear me. If Bourbon comes back, it will be to liberate the people from oppression, and bring them peace and happiness. He loves France better than the king loves it."

"In that case, I hope he may get away safely, and come back speedily," said the old woman.

"Amen!" cried Bourbon. "Heaven has already delivered him from many dangers, and will not desert him now! Farewell, good dame!"

"A good journey to you, messieurs," she rejoined. "Stay," she added to Hugues; "though I can't furnish you with horses, I can supply you with provisions, and you will need them in the mountains."

So saying, she hastily filled a basket with bread

and cold meat, and did not neglect to add a couple of flasks of wine.

Armed with this supply, Hugues followed his leaders out of the house, and the party took their way along a rarely-trodden footpath towards the mountains.

They had not proceeded more than a league, when they found they were pursued by the provost of Vienne and his guard, and again sought shelter in a wood. Nor did they venture forth till nightfall, when they marched on vigorously, and reached the mountains without further interruption.

Nearly four days, marked by incessant toil and exposure to hardship, difficulties, and dangers of many kinds, elapsed before Bourbon and his companions reached Chambery.

Often, in the course of the wearisome journey, they lost their way among the mountains, for they did not dare to employ a guide, and only when compelled by absolute necessity did they approach a châlet.

Nevertheless, through all this fatigue and danger, Bourbon never lost heart — never for a moment doubted his ultimate escape. Both he and Pomperant had too often known a soldier's couch to heed sleeping amid the mountains with only the skies above them; and Hugues was not less hardy. Had it not been

for the risk to which he was exposed, this kind of life would not have been without a charm to the fugitive prince. Magnificent scenery was presented to him. Mountains, sometimes bare and craggy, sometimes rounded and clothed with trees almost to their summit — while from these heights lovely views were obtained of broad and fertile valleys, watered by rapid streams, and peopled with villages — or a vast plain, spreading out for leagues, giving glimpses here and there of the rushing Rhône, and bounded in the distance by the snowy peaks of the Alps. Such were some of the prospects which cheered Bourbon during his detention amid the Jura mountains.

At last he approached Chambery, but neither he nor Pomperant ventured into the town, but, tarrying in the environs, sent on Hugues to reconnoitre. Some time elapsed before their emissary returned. He had managed to replenish his basket with wine and provisions, but brought word that the town was full of soldiers, the Comte de Saint-Pol being there with a large force, on his way to Italy to join Bonnivet.

This intelligence caused Bourbon at once to abandon the design he had formed of crossing the Alps and proceeding to Genoa, and decided him, at whatever risk, to prosecute his original design, and

make for the Franche-Comté. There was danger in the latter course, but far greater danger from Saint-Pol and his troops.

Without entering the town, Bourbon therefore turned aside from Chambery, and took the way towards Aix. They walked for a couple of hours, when worn out almost by fatigue, they approached a châlet, and obtained accommodation for the night. The account they gave of themselves satisfied the master of the châlet, and they left early next morning without exciting his suspicion. On reaching the Lac de Bourget, they hired a boat, and were rowed to the farther end of that beautiful lake.

Having reached Seyssel in safety, they crossed the Rhône, and sought shelter in a châlet for the night. Next morning they again began to ascend the Jura, and after crossing several peaks, and tracking more than one gloomy gorge, they came in sight of the ancient town of Nantua, seated on the borders of a lake. Not daring, however, to enter the town, they again sought the shelter of a châlet. A mountainous ridge now only separated them from the Franche-Comté. This ridge crossed, Bourbon's danger would be over.

At break of day the fugitives again started on their journey. It was a lovely morning, and the beauty of the scenery might have tempted them to

linger on their way; but they hurried on, eager to cross the frontier.

On attaining the summit of a mountain commanding the beautiful valley, in which lay the old town of Nantua and its lake, Bourbon paused for a moment to survey the lovely prospect, and then became aware that a small troop of cavalry was ascending the heights. Pointing out the danger to his companions they all three started off, and, after crossing the summit of the mountain, dashed down the opposite side. Near the foot of the acclivity there was a thick dark wood, and into this they plunged, though not unperceived by their pursuers, who by this time had gained the brow of the mountain.

At the sight, the soldiers dashed down the hill, a portion of the troop entering the wood, while the others rode round it. By this manœuvre they hoped to secure their prey; but they were foiled. Three of the men-at-arms, who had penetrated into the thicket, were suddenly set upon by Bourbon and his companions, and compelled to give up their horses. Being thus provided with steeds, the fugitives suddenly burst out of the wood and galloped towards the frontier, which was marked by the river Ain, now only half a league off.

On a mount on the farther side of the river

stood a fort garrisoned by the soldiers of the Em peror, and it was towards this point that the fugi tives now shaped their course. But they were hotl pursued by their enemies, while another small ban of cavalry, sallying from a fort on the French sid of the river, sought to cut off their retreat. Befor the latter could come up, however, Bourbon and hi companions had reached the river, and dashing int it without hesitation, swam their horses safel across.

When they landed on the opposite bank the were welcomed by a company of German reiter to whom the Constable immediately announce himself, and on learning his quality the men shoo their lances, and set up a loud shout of "Viv Bourbon!"

XVIII.

Saint-Claude.

At the Constable's request he was conducted by the reiters to the fort, where he was received with all the honour due to his rank by the governor, who congratulated him most heartily on his escape, and gave him the very satisfactory intelligence that all his adherents whom he had quitted at the Château d'Herment — including the Seigneurs Tansannes, Du Peloux, Espinat, and Desguières — together with Lurcy, had already succeeded in reaching the Franche-Comté.

"Your highness will find them at Sainte-Claude, where they are anxiously awaiting your arrival," said the governor. "They are guests of Cardinal Labaume, Sovereign Bishop of Geneva, and are sojourning at the episcopal palace. Most of them arrived nearly a week ago, but the Seigneur Lurcy only crossed the frontier yesterday."

"I am rejoiced to learn that Lurcy has escaped," said Bourbon. "I have heard nothing of him, and feared he might have fallen into the hands of the king, who would have shown him no mercy."

"That is quite certain," replied the governor.

"Your highness is no doubt aware that the Comte de Saint-Vallier, the Bishops of Autun and Puy, the Seigneurs Aimard de Prie, Pierre de Popillon, Chancellor of the Bourbonnois, Gilbert Baudemanche, and others of your partisans, have been arrested and lodged in the Conciergerie at Paris. It is said, but I know not with what truth, that the Comte de Saint-Vallier has been tortured, to wring confession from him."

"Alas!" exclaimed Bourbon, "he is most unjustly dealt with. Of all my partisans, Saint-Vallier is the last who ought to be punished, for he endeavoured to dissuade me from my design, and yet it is on his devoted head that the tyrant seems bent on wreaking his direst vengeance. But a day of retribution is at hand. For every life sacrificed by François, I will have ten."

"I am sorry to mar your highness's satisfaction at a moment like the present," said the governor, "but I could not withhold this painful news from you."

"I thank you for giving it me, sir," rejoined Bourbon. "The information steels my breast. As I have just said, if I cannot deliver my friends, I can avenge them. But what of the ten thousand

lanz-knechts that were to be raised for me by the Comtes Fürstenberg?"

"On hearing of your highness's flight," returned the governor, "the Comtes Fürstenberg marched with their men towards the west, to join the Anglo-Flemish army in Picardy. They took several castles by the way, but I fear they have encountered serious obstacles. The last tidings received of them were, that they were retreating to Neufchâteau on the Meuse, after heavy losses."

"Would I had been with them!" cried Bourbon. "But where are the four thousand Vaudois promised me?"

"They have returned to their own country, fearing they would get no pay," replied the governor.

"Then I have no army in the Franche-Comté?"

"Your highness will soon raise one. When your escape is known, thousands will flock round your standard."

With this assurance Bourbon was forced to be content. He tarried for a few hours at the fort to rest and refresh himself, and during this time both he and Pomperant were enabled, by the governor's aid, to make some change in their habiliments, of which they stood greatly in need.

Thus newly equipped, and attended by Hugues,

who had likewise obtained fresh habiliments, they started for Saint-Claude, accompanied by an escort of twenty reiters.

As he rode along, Bourbon could not help contrasting his present position with that in which he had been so lately placed. A few hours ago, he was environed by enemies, and in danger of his life. Now he was free, and would soon be able to requite the injuries he had sustained. His exultation was damped by the thought that so many of his partisans were in the king's hands, but this reflection only served to intensify his desire for vengeance.

On arriving at Saint-Claude, he repaired at once to the episcopal palace, and presenting himself to Cardinal Labaume, received a cordial welcome from the prelate, who was a zealous partisan of the Emperor.

After listening with great interest to Bourbon's account of his flight, and the perils he had encountered, the Cardinal sent for Lurcy and the rest of the Constable's adherents, and was much touched by the meeting that took place between them and their fugitive lord.

Bourbon himself was profoundly affected on beholding his devoted friends, and embraced each individually.

"This rewards me for all my suffering," he said. "You must forgive me, my good friends, for quitting you. The step was absolutely necessary for the safety of us all. Had I not taken it, we might not be here now."

"Your highness's escape from so many perils is truly providential," observed Cardinal Labaume. "Thanks should be offered to the Great Power who has so marvellously preserved you. Let us now repair to my chapel, where you can perform your devotions."

Though a stern soldier, Bourbon was devout, and religiously believing that the hand of Heaven had been manifested in his behalf, it was with unwonted fervour that he offered up his grateful prayers at the altar of the small chapel to which he was led by the cardinal.

XIX.

In what manner Bourbon entered Besançon.

Bourbon remained for three days at Saint-Claude, the guest of Cardinal Labaume, by whom he was entertained with princely hospitality. On the fourth day, he departed for Besançon, accompanied by all his adherents, and attended by a numerous escort of reiters, furnished for him by the cardinal. Among his suite was Hugues, who was now enrolled in his service.

Harbingers had been sent on to announce Bourbon's visit to the ancient capital of the Franche-Comté. Preparations, therefore, for his reception had been made by the municipal authorities, who, in order to please the Emperor and mortify the King of France, had determined to treat Bourbon as a sovereign prince.

The city of Besançon, which existed in the time of the Romans, and which has been described by Cæsar himself, was a place of great strength, built on a hill, almost surrounded by the river Doubs, which here takes the form of a horse-shoe. On a rocky height, the base of which was washed by the Doubs, stood the castle, originally built by the

Romans; and in later times, when Besançon was annexed to France after the peace of Nimeguen, was converted into a citadel by Vauban. From its position, this castle looked impregnable, and capable of protecting the city, but it was besieged and taken by Louis XIV. in 1660. On a plain between two branches of the Doubs, where the Roman legions had once been encamped, and which is still known as the *Campus Martius*, could be seen the tents of a small force of German lanz-knechts, reserved by the Emperor for the defence of the province.

On his arrival at Besançon, Bourbon was met at the foot of the old bridge across the Doubs by the burgomaster and all the civic authorities on horseback, and welcomed by them to the city. After listening to an address from the burgomaster, he was conducted across the bridge, which was lined by German lanz-knechts, into the city, amid the roar of ordnance, the braying of trumpets, the beating of drums, and the acclamations of the spectators. The picturesque old houses were decked with garlands of flowers, and hung with scrolls and banners, houses were decorated with carpets and rich stuffs, the fountains ran with wine, and the capital of the Franche-Comté had not been so festive since the time when the Emperor last visited it.

Bourbon was conducted by the burgomaster and the other magistrates to the cathedral of Saint-Jean, a noble Gothic pile, and as he dismounted at the porch, enthusiastic shouts were raised by the lanz-knechts crowding the enclosure — the interior of the sacred pile being so full that they could not obtain admittance. Thanksgivings were then offered for the deliverance of the fugitive prince from his enemies, and a *Te Deum* sung. At the close of these religious solemnities, Bourbon was taken to the Herrenhaus, where a grand banquet had been prepared.

All honours that could have been bestowed upon the Emperor himself was shown to the illustrious fugitive. A palatial mansion in the midst of the city, which Charles V. himself had occupied, was appropriated to him, and a numerous civic guard assigned him.

Notwithstanding this brilliant reception, Bourbon was greatly disheartened by the intelligence he received of the proceedings of his royal allies. To his mortification he learnt that the Spanish forces had been successfully held in check at Bayonne by Lautrec, while the Duke of Suffolk, who had made a descent upon the coast of Picardy, and had advanced almost within sight of Paris, had been recalled by the King of England. Moreover, a large

force had been placed by François upon the frontiers of Burgundy, under the joint command of the Duke d'Alençon and the Duke de Guise, while the king himself still remained at Lyons with the army.

Bourbon had now been more than a fortnight at Besançon, burning with impatience to avenge his injuries, when despatches arrived from Spain and England. Both monarchs attributed the failure of the design to him. Had he performed his promises, the joint invasion must have been successful. But when he fled, Henry recalled his forces, and the Emperor suspended the siege of Bayonne. The King of England refused the supplies of money and artillery which Bourbon had urgently demanded of him, and the Emperor professed himself unable to send him either money or succour. Both declared that the project must be for the present abandoned.

Bourbon's hopes of immediate revenge being thus at an end, he resolved to proceed without delay to Spain, in order to hold a personal interview with the Emperor, and, if possible, plan a campaign for the winter.

His design was to pass into Italy by way of Germany, Switzerland being then allied to France, and he proposed in the first instance to visit his

cousin the Duke of Mantua. From Mantua he would proceed to Genoa, and thence embark for Spain.

While he was making preparations for his meditated journey, he was informed, one morning, that the Seigneur d'Imbaut, a gentleman belonging to the household of the King of France, furnished with a sauf conduit, had arrived at Besançon, and sought a private audience of him.

Bourbon refused a private audience, but consented to receive the envoy in the presence of his adherents. Accordingly, D'Imbaut was ushered into a great hall half filled with the civic guard, armed with halberds. At the upper end of the hall, on a chair of state, sat Bourbon, surrounded by his partisans.

After making a profound obeisance, the envoy said:

"I am the bearer of a message from my royal master the King of France. I am sent to offer to your highness a full and complete pardon for all your offences committed against his majesty and against the state, if you will engage to merit clemency by sincere repentance, and unshaken fidelity for the future."

Here D'Imbaut paused, but Bourbon making no reply, he went on:

"As an incitement to your highness to return to your duty, the king my master graciously offers you the immediate restitution of the whole of your possessions, which will otherwise be confiscated, the re-establishment of all the pensions of which you have been deprived, with full assurance that they shall hereafter be paid with exactitude." He then paused for a moment, and added, "What answer shall I take from your highness to his majesty?"

"Tell the king your master," rejoined Bourbon, sternly and haughtily, "that I have thrown off my allegiance to him, and consequently he has no power to pardon me. Tell him that he has already played me false, and that I would not trust his promise to restore me my possessions, or to continue my pensions. Tell him to confiscate my domains if he likes — I will soon have them back again."

"I will repeat word for word what your highness has told me," replied the envoy.

"You may depart, then," said Bourbon.

"I have not yet done," said D'Imbaut, assuming a different and more haughty manner; "since your highness has declared that you have thrown off your allegiance, I must, in the name of the king my master, demand your sword as Constable of France."

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Bourbon's eyes blazed with anger at this demand, but he constrained himself.

"The king your master took that sword from me at Fontainebleau," he said. "But I have another sword, which he shall have — when he can take it."

"I have my answer," said D'Imbaut.

Then looking round at the group of gentlemen, he asked:

"Messeigneurs, do you all remain obstinate in rebellion? I am enabled to offer you the king's grace. Will none of you accept it?"

"None," they replied, with one voice.

"A moment, sir," said Bourbon to the envoy. "Tell the king your master, from me, his enemy, that when next we meet we shall have changed places. It will be for him to sue for pardon."

Charged with this defiant message, D'Imbaut departed.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK III.

THE CHEVALIER BAYARD.

I.

How the Comte de Saint-Vallier's Pardon was obtained.

On learning that his offer had been scornfully rejected by Bourbon, as related in the preceding chapter, François I. at once ordered the Chancellor Duprat to confiscate the whole of the fugitive's possessions, to degrade him from his rank, and declare his name infamous; to efface his armorial bearings, and his swords as Constable from all his châteaux; to demolish in part his magnificent hôtel in Paris, and strew the ground with salt; and to cause the public executioner to sully with yellow ochre such portion of the building as should be left standing, in order that it might remain as a memento of the duke's treason.

Thus did the infuriated king wreak his vengeance upon the enemy who was beyond his grasp. For a time, François remained at Lyons, fearing that Bourbon might raise an army in the Franche-Comté and march into France, and entirely abandoning his design of proceeding to Italy, began to adopt vigorous measures for the defence of his own kingdom. He despatched the Duc de Vendôme and

Chabot to Paris to watch over the defence of the capital, and ordered the grand seneschal of Normandy, De Brézé, to raise six thousand men in that province. His apprehensions, however, were relieved by the retirement of the English army, and by the withdrawal of the Emperor's forces from before Bayonne.

Tired at last of his sojourn at Lyons, yet indisposed to return to Paris, François proceeded to Blois, and in the magnificent château, which he had partially rebuilt in the style of the Renaissance, sought to banish his cares by abandoning himself to pleasurable enjoyment; passing his days in the chase, and his nights in festivity. Amidst all his distractions, he could not banish from his breast the image of the fair Diane de Poitiers. The violent passion he had conceived for her still possessed him, though months had flown by since he had seen her.

The king was at Blois when a messenger arrived from the chief president of the Parliament, De Selve, to acquaint his majesty with the judgment pronounced upon the principal personages connected with Bourbon's conspiracy.

"First, in regard to the nineteen accomplices of Charles de Bourbon, who have followed their rebellious lord in his flight from the kingdom," said the messenger. "These contumacious rebels are all con-

demned to death, and, if taken, that sentence will be immediately carried into effect upon them. In the case of Lurcy, whose guilt is held to be greater than that of the others, the sentence is that his head shall be exposed on the bridge over the Rhône at Lyons."

"Pass on from the fugitives to the traitors who are in our power," said the king. "How have they been dealt with? — with due severity, I trust."

"The Bishop of Puy has been liberated, sire," replied the messenger, "but the Bishop of Autun is to be deprived of his possessions, and detained a prisoner during your majesty's pleasure."

"Why should more clemency be shown to one prelate than to the other?" said François. "Both are equally guilty, methinks! Proceed."

"Desguières and Bertrand Simon are condemned to make amende honorable, and to be imprisoned for three years in any castle your majesty may appoint," said the messenger. "D'Escars is adjudged to the torture; Gilbert de Baudemanche is sentenced to a brief imprisonment; and Sainte-Bonnet is acquitted."

"And what of Saint-Vallier?" demanded the king.

"Sire, he is to be deprived of his possessions, to be degraded from his rank, to be put to the tor-

ture, and afterwards beheaded at the Place de Grève."

"A just and proper sentence," remarked François. "All the others should have been served in like manner."

"It rests with your majesty to appoint the day for Saint-Vallier's execution," said the messenger.

"I will think of it," replied François. And the messenger quitted the presence.

Shortly afterwards, another messenger arrived, bringing a letter from the Duchesse d'Angoulême to the king, her son, in which she urged him not to show any clemency to Saint-Vallier. "Be firm on this point," she wrote. "Too much leniency has been shown towards the conspirators by the Parliament, and if a severe example be not made of some of them, it will be an incitement to rebellion. Strong efforts, I know, will be made to induce you to pardon Saint-Vallier, but do not yield to the solicitations. The Chancellor Duprat concurs with me in opinion."

"Shall I take back an answer from your majesty?" said the messenger.

"Say to her highness that I will attend to her counsel," replied the king, dismissing the messenger.

Somewhat later in the day, while the king was still in his chamber, he was informed by an usher

that the Comtesse de Maulévrier had just arrived at the château, and besought an immediate interview with him.

François at once granted the request, and Diane de Poitiers was ushered into his presence. Her lovely features bore traces of profound affliction. At a sign from the king, the usher immediately withdrew and left them alone.

"You will readily divine my errand, sire," cried Diane, throwing herself on her knees before him, in spite of his efforts to prevent her. "You know that my unfortunate father has been condemned by the Parliament to torture and to death by the headsman's hand. Have compassion on him, sire — spare him — for my sake!"

"Rise, Diane, and listen to me," said François. "My heart prompts me to yield to your solicitations, but, were I to do so, my clemency would be misconstrued. The Comte de Saint-Vallier having been found guilty of lèse-majesté and rebellion by the solemn tribunal at which he has been placed, I am compelled to confirm the sentence passed upon him. Bourbon's revolt has steeled my breast to pity. Your father was the traitor's chief friend and counsellor."

"As such, sire, he strove to dissuade the duke from his design," she cried.

"The Parliament can have had no proof of that beyond your father's affirmation," said the king. "On the contrary, they believe him to be deeper dyed in treason than the rest of the conspirators."

"My father's judges have been unjust, sire," she rejoined; "but I see it is in vain to convince you of his innocence. You are determined to wreak your vengeance upon him, in order that the blow may be felt by Bourbon. The answer you have given me is little in accordance with your former language."

"You ask what I cannot grant, Diane. Why torture me thus?"

"I will torture you no more. Adieu, sire! I quit your presence never to re-enter it."

"Stay, Diane," he cried, detaining her. "I can not part with you thus. You know how passionately I love you."

"I find it impossible to reconcile your professions with your conduct, sire. As for myself, if I have ever felt love for you, I will tear if from my heart."

"Then you confess that you have loved me, Diane? You never owned as much before. Nay, to speak truth, I fancied from the coldness of your manner that you were insensible to my passion."

"It matters little now what my feelings have

been towards you, sire," she rejoined. "But if it will pain you to know the truth, I will not hide it. I *did* love you — love you passionately. But I hate you now — ay, hate you as a tyrant."

"No, no, you do not, cannot hate me," he cried. "It is impossible to resist your influence. You have conquered. I yield," he added, kneeling to her. "Say that you love me still, and I will grant your request."

"Your majesty has already extorted the avowal from me," she rejoined. "I thought you had crushed the feeling, but I find it still survives. Promise me my father's life, and all the love my heart has to bestow shall be yours."

"I do promise it," he replied, clasping her in his arms. "The Comte de Saint-Vallier ought to rejoice that he has so powerful an advocate. None but yourself could have saved him. I had fully determined on his death."

"Mistake not my father, sire," she rejoined. "He would not accept pardon from you if he knew how it was purchased. Dread of dishonour made him join with Bourbon."

"Think no more of that," said François, passionately. "I care not to inquire into his motives for rebellion, since I design to pardon him. But I

account it worse than treason that he should forbid you to love me."

"Enough of this, sire. I must crave leave to depart. I shall never feel easy till I know that my father is safe. Let me return to Paris with his pardon."

"A messenger is here from the first president," replied François. "He shall take back the warrant."

"I can trust it to no custody but my own," said Diane. "You will not refuse me this, sire?"

"I have said that I can refuse you nothing, sweet Diane," he rejoined. "But you will come back soon?"

"As soon as I have set my father free," she rejoined.

"Stay, Diane. I must not deceive you," said François, somewhat gravely. "I cannot order your father's immediate liberation. He must remain a prisoner for a time."

"You will not belie your royal word, sire?" she cried. "You do not mean to play me false?"

"I *will* liberate the Comte de Saint-Vallier ere long, and bestow a full pardon on him — foi de gentilhomme!" said the king. "For the present, I can merely commute his sentence into imprisonment. But that is tantamount to pardon."

"Since your majesty gives me that assurance, I

am content," said Diane. "But let me have the warrant."

François at once sat down at a table, and tracing a few lines on a sheet of paper, signed the despatch, and gave it to her. "This letter to the Chancellor Duprat will accomplish all you desire," he said. "Your father is in no danger of torture or the headsman's axe. He will be sent to the Château de Loches. But he will soon be liberated. Are you content?"

"I must be, sire," said Diane, as she took the letter. "I shall fly with the missive to Paris."

"Return as quickly as you can," said François. "Were it possible, you should bring the Comte de Saint-Vallier with you."

"He would rather remain in his dungeon than accompany me," she rejoined. "Adieu, sire."

And, quitting the cabinet, she entered her litter, and proceeded towards Paris.

II.

How Bourbon was appointed to the Command of the Imperial Army.

Accompanied by all his partisans, and attended by a strong escort of reiters, the Duke de Bourbon set out from Besançon for Italy. Shaping his course through Germany, and eventually reaching Coire, he crossed the Alps by the Splugen, which at that time was a difficult and dangerous proceeding, and passing through Bergamo and Brescia, succeeded in reaching Mantua in safety. Here he was cordially welcomed by his cousin, Federico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua — a prince of great ability, and a staunch partisan of the Emperor, by whom he was subsequently raised to a ducal dignity. Gonzaga was a great patron of arts and letters, and his court was the resort of painters, sculptors, and men of learning and science.

Bourbon and his suite were lodged in the vast Castello di Corte, and several grand entertainments were given in his honour at this palace, and at the magnificent Palazzo del Te. The illustrious fugitive's safe arrival at Mantua was made the occasion of general rejoicings in the city; a tournament was

held in the Piazza della Fiera, and a solemn procession was made by Gonzaga and his whole court to the Duomo, where thanksgivings were offered for the duke's deliverance.

Gonzaga did not confine himself to a mere display of hospitality towards his noble kinsman, but voluntarily proffered him all the assistance in his power. Of money Bourbon was not in immediate need, since the whole of the treasure which he had confided to his adherents, after quitting them at the Château d'Herment, had been restored to him, and he hoped to be able to obtain supplies from the Emperor for the payment of such forces as he might raise. Having the utmost reliance on the judgment of Gonzaga, Bourbon explained all his plans to him, mentioning that the Emperor had promised him the hand of his sister Leanor, the widowed Queen of Portugal.

"I counsel you not to claim fulfilment of that promise, said Gonzaga. "Most assuredly the Emperor will find a pretext to evade its performance. When the offer was made, you were the most powerful noble in France, and able, it was supposed, to raise all the central provinces in revolt. But your design has been thwarted by the prudent conduct of the king, who, by remaining at Lyons with his army, and, overawing your vassals, has prevented the insurrection, and compelled you to seek safety

in flight. Having thus failed to accomplish your part of the compact, and thereby caused the Emperor's plans to miscarry, you cannot expect him to perform his part of the treaty. You are not now in the same position as heretofore."

"I am still Bourbon, and have still a sword," rejoined the duke, proudly. "I have now only twenty men at my back, but I will soon have twenty thousand."

"I nothing doubt it, cousin," replied Gonzaga. "You will soon regain the position you have lost. But do not go to Spain. Send Lurcy to the Emperor. Ask for the command of a battalion in the Imperial army now opposed to the French in the Milanese, and the request will certainly be granted. An immediate opportunity of distinction will then be afforded you. You will share the command with generals of the highest repute — with Sforza, Duke of Milan — with the valiant Marquis de Pescara — with the skilful Antonio de Leyva — with Lannoy, the Viceroy of Naples — and Giovanni de' Medici. Drive the French from Italy, secure the Milanese to Spain, and you will have earned the Emperor's gratitude. The utmost of your ambitious hopes may then be realised. The Queen of Portugal may become your consort — and a portion of France may be allotted to you as a kingdom."

Bourbon at once acted upon Gonzaga's advice, and despatched Lurcy with a letter to Charles V., in which he made no allusion to his Imperial Majesty's promises, but simply asked for a command in the confederate army.

Charged with this despatch, Lurcy proceeded to Genoa, where he embarked for Barcelona, and thence made his way to Madrid.

While awaiting the Emperor's response, Bourbon was condemned to a month's inaction — a sore trial to his patience. At last, Lurcy returned, accompanied by the Comte de Beaurain. Desirous that Gonzaga should hear the Emperor's answer, Bourbon received Beaurain in the presence of the marquis.

"What answer do you bring me from his Imperial Majesty?" he demanded of the envoy.

"This, my lord," replied Beaurain, delivering a warrant. "My master the Emperor has appointed your highness lieutenant-general of his army in Italy, and representative of his person. As such, you will be supreme in command — even above the Viceroy of Naples."

With a look of satisfaction, Bourbon turned to Gonzaga, and said:

"I will soon lower Bonnivet's pride, and drive his army across the Alps. That done, the conquest of France itself will speedily follow."

III.

The two Armies in the Milanese.

BEFORE proceeding further, it will be necessary to describe the position of the two opposing armies in the Milanese, and to consider their relative strength.

Entrusted by his royal master with supreme command, and persuaded that he could recover the Milanese, which had been lost by Lautrec, the rash and presumptuous Bonnivet descended into the plains of Lombardy at the head of a large army, comprising about forty thousand men, more than half of whom were drawn from the Swiss cantons, Lorraine and Guelders, and some of the smaller Italian states.

Associated with Bonnivet were several brave and experienced leaders, some of them far more fitted for command than himself — namely, the valiant Maréchal de Montmorency, the heroic Chevalier Bayard, Jean de Chabannes, Seigneur de Vandenesse, the Comte de Saint-Pol, the Vidame de Chartres, Annebaut, De Lorges, Beauvais, Jean de Diesbach, a Swiss leader of distinction, and two

Italian nobles, Federico da Bozzolo and Renzo da Ceri.

On entering the Milanese, Bonnivet encountered little opposition, and possessed himself without difficulty of a large portion of the duchy. The veteran Prospero Colonna, who then commanded the Imperial army, after ineffectually disputing the French general's passage across the Ticino, withdrew to Lodi, while Antonio de Leyva threw himself with three thousand men into Pavia, and at once prepared for the defence of that city.

Had Bonnivet marched direct upon Milan, in all probability the place would have succumbed, for though the Duke Francisco Sforza possessed a garrison of fifteen thousand infantry, eight hundred lances, and as many light horse, the city was not in a state of defence, the walls which had been partially demolished by Lautrec not having been rebuilt. It soon became evident, however, that a blockade merely was intended by the French commander; whereupon active preparations for the defence of the city were made by Morone, the Duke of Milan's chancellor. The walls were repaired, and the garrison quickly and effectually provisioned.

Meantime, Bonnivet, seizing upon Monza, began to lay waste the country, destroyed the mills, and cut off the canals that supplied Milan with water.

He then fixed his camp at Abbiate-Grasso, in which position he could intercept all communications from the south. On the west he was master of the course of the Ticino to Vigevano, and on the north, as we have said, he held Monza. Thus placed, he felt confident of reducing Milan by famine. Besides the capital of Lombardy, only one important city now remained in possession of the Imperialists — namely, Pavia — but its strength and situation rendered it capable of standing a lengthened siege.

As to Milan itself, which was now occupied by Prospero Colonna and Francisco Sforza, it had been put, by the exertions of Morone, into such a state of defence, that it was impossible to take it by assault.

In the midst of these operations, Pope Adrian VI. died, and was succeeded on the Pontifical throne, after a long and severe struggle, by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, who on his election assumed the name of Clement VII.

In the new Pope the French expected to find an enemy, while the Emperor calculated upon his friendship; but the secret desire of Clement VII., a prelate of great judgment and experience, was to remain neutral, and he proposed that a truce should be agreed upon, during which he might be able to mediate between the conflicting powers. The proposi-

tion, however, was indignantly rejected on either side, while the want of zeal in the Pope excited the anger of the Emperor. To appease him, Clement VII. secretly gave twenty thousand ducats to his ambassador, and compelled the Florentines to furnish a like sum.

Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Milan began to suffer from famine, for although there was plenty of corn in the city, it could not be ground, the mills having been destroyed. During eight days, more than a hundred thousand persons wanted bread, and the city was reduced to the greatest straits, when at last Monza was evacuated by Bonnivet, and provisions were obtained from Bergamo and the Venetian states.

Things were in this posture when the octogenarian general, Prospero Colonna, whose health had been for some time failing, breathed his last. In Colonna the confederates lost a most sagacious and experienced leader, who perfectly understood the art of war. Taking Fabius as his model, he would never fight a battle if it could be avoided, and it was one of his maxims, that "the glory of a general suffers more from rashness than it gains from the éclat of victory."

Charles de Lannoy, who succeeded Prospero Colonna as commander of the confederate forces, was

a man of middle age, and distinguished not merely for military skill and bravery, but for profound judgment. His early reputation had been won under the Emperor Maximilian, and his high qualities recommended him to Charles V., by whom he was made governor of Tournay, and subsequently viceroy of Naples.

On quitting Naples to assume the command of the Imperial army, Lannoy was accompanied by the Marquis de Pescara, one of the Emperor's most distinguished generals, respecting whom we must say a few words.

Descended from the illustrious house of Avalos of Toledo, Pescara inherited all the pride and arrogance of his ancestors. Though still young, for at the period of which we treat he was only thirty-four, he had passed a long life in arms. He was taken prisoner by the French at the battle of Ravenna, and on his release returned to the army, and was again worsted at Vicenza, but covered himself with glory by driving Lautrec from Milan in 1521 — only two years before our history. This achievement won him the greater renown since the cautious Prospero Colonna declined to attempt the enterprise. In the succeeding campaign the valiant Spanish leader distinguished himself by several brilliant feats of arms. He succoured Pavia when besieged by the French —

helped to win the battle of Bicocca — took Lodi and Pizzighettone — and compelled Lescun to surrender Cremona. He subsequently besieged and took Genoa, delivering the city to pillage. These exploits caused him to be regarded as one of the great captains of the age. Fearless, energetic, rash, Pescara derided danger, and would undertake any enterprise, however hazardous. His constant disagreements, however, with Colonna rendered his position in the confederate army unsupportable, and he resigned his command and withdrew to Naples, where he remained till Lannoy was called upon to fill Colonna's post. In obedience to the Emperor's orders, Pescara then returned to Milan to resume his command of the Spanish forces, his place having been temporarily filled by Captain Alarcon.

The haughty marquis was perfectly content to serve under Lannoy; but when he heard of Bourbon's appointment as lieutenant-general of the confederate army, and representative of the Emperor, his jealousy was immediately excited.

Another Spanish general of distinction, of whom we shall have occasion hereafter more fully to speak, was Don Antonio de Leyva. At this juncture he occupied Pavia with a force of six thousand infantry and a thousand horse, and had so strongly fortified the city that he conceived it impregnable. De

Leyva had risen to his present eminence after a long and brilliant career.

The command of the Italian division, which consisted of Lombards, Florentines, Romans, Modenese, Lucchese, and Neapolitan soldiers, was entrusted to Francisco Sforza, Duke of Milan. Associated with Sforza was the Duke of Urbino, general of the Venetian forces, who had recently joined the confederates.

IV.

How the Duke de Bourbon entered Milan.

Immediately on receiving the appointment from the Emperor, Bourbon set out from Mantua to assume the command of the Imperial army. All his suite went with him, and he was accompanied by Gonzaga with a guard of six hundred lances. Tidings of his approach to Milan having preceded him, Francisco Sforza, magnificently accoutred, and attended by a glittering train of three hundred knights, all superbly arrayed, came forth from the gates of the city to meet him. The Duke of Milan was accompanied by his chancellor, Geronimo Morone, who was robed in black velvet, and wore a massive gold chain over his shoulders. Morone was a man of middle age, of grave aspect, and dignified demeanour.

Armed from head to foot in polished steel, and bestriding a powerful black charger, which was sumptuously caparisoned in housings of crimson velvet embroidered with his arms, and having a chanfrin of snowy plumes at its head, Bourbon presented a splendid appearance. All his suite were

richly accoutred, and well mounted. Nothing could be more cordial than the greeting that passed between Sforza and Bourbon, and after an exchange of courtesies, they rode side by side into Milan, followed by Morone and Gonzaga.

As the cavalcade approached the gates, Bourbon examined the newly repaired walls and bastions, and cast a glance of approval at Morone. Bourbon himself, after the battle of Marignano, had been governor of Milan, and if his rule over the conquered city had been necessarily severe, he had not, like his successor, the Maréchal de Lautrec, rendered himself personally obnoxious to the citizens. But if any feelings of animosity had formerly existed towards him, they were now forgotten, and he was greeted with smiles and the waving of scarves and kerchiefs from the fair occupants of windows and balconies, and by loud acclamations from the populace thronging the streets as he rode along.

Owing to the crowd and some stoppages, the progress of the cavalcade was somewhat slow, but at last, emerging from a long narrow street, it issued into a broad piazza, and the stately Duomo — the pride of Milan — burst upon them. Often as Bourbon had gazed upon this glorious Gothic fane — often as he had studied its marvellous architectural beauties — it had lost none of its effect

upon him, but excited his admiration as powerfully as ever. But he had little time to gaze upon it. The piazza in front of the fane was entirely filled with soldiers, and as the cavalcade crossed it, the place resounded with shouts of "Viva Bourbon!"

Amid such enthusiastic demonstrations, Sforza and those with him proceeded to the ducal palace, and on entering the court, which was half filled with mounted Spanish soldiers, they found three knightly personages, all fully accoutred and on horseback, waiting to receive them. These were Lannoy, Viceroy of Naples, the Marquis de Pescara, and Giovanni de' Medici. From his gorgeous armour and the rich trappings of his charger, Lannoy made a very imposing appearance. He was powerfully built, stern of aspect, and stately in manner, and his looks bespoke wisdom and resolution.

Very different in appearance, but equally martial in aspect, was the haughty Spanish general, Pescara. Possessing a light, active, well-knit frame, he seemed capable of enduring any amount of fatigue, and of executing any enterprise that his daring spirit might conceive. His features were regular and handsome, and the scars on his cheek and brow did not detract from his good looks while communicating a certain grimness to his aspect. His complexion was swarthy, and his beard, which he wore pointed in the Spanish

fashion, coal-black. His expression was fierce, and his deportment proud and overbearing. When angry, his dark eyes seemed literally to blaze. Over his lacquered accoutrements he wore a surcoat on which his arms were blazoned, and was mounted on a fiery Andalusian barb, which had borne him through many a fray, and like himself had been often wounded. What with his striking physiognomy, his proud martial deportment, his splendid accoutrements, and his fiery barb, Pescara looked the beau ideal of a warrior.

Younger and handsomer than the redoubted Spanish general was the gallant Giovanni de' Medici, who promised to become one of the most distinguished captains of the age. Like Pescara, Medici was active and enterprising, and was checked by no difficulty; as shrewd in devising a stratagem as resolute in carrying it out. His features were classical in outline, and lighted up large soft blue eyes, which gave little indication of the latent fierceness of his nature. His figure was tall and admirably proportioned, and his deportment commanding. Like the others, he was splendidly arrayed, and his charger richly barded.

As Bourbon entered the court-yard with the Duke of Milan, the three leaders just described advanced to meet him, and saluted him. After an

exchange of courteous speeches, the whole party alighted, and entering the palace, were conducted by Sforza to a grand banqueting-chamber, where a sumptuous repast awaited them. Their discourse during the banquet turned chiefly upon certain movements which had just been made by Bonnivet, and in reply to an inquiry from Bourbon, Pescara mentioned that the French general had placed his advanced guard at Robecco, a small town between Pavia and Lodi. "He has done this," continued Pescara, "to intercept our convoys. I have a plan which, if it meets your highness's approval, I will execute to-night. Before detailing it, I must explain that Robecco is a mere village, without defence of any kind, and is at least a league from the head-quarters of the French army. The vanguard consists of only two hundred horsemen, and the like number of foot soldiers. But it is commanded by Bayard."

"Then it is in charge of the best captain of the French forces," remarked Bourbon. "Bonnivet must be mad to place Bayard in such an exposed position."

"Perhaps he wishes him to incur a defeat," said Pescara, with a laugh. "If so, his malice will be gratified, for I mean to surprise the post to-night. Had it been held by any other than the invincible

chevalier, I should have sent Alarcon; but, as Bayard is there, I shall go myself."

"I approve of the plan, marquis," said Bourbon. "But let me give you a piece of counsel. Make your men wear their shirts over their accoutrements, in order that you may recognise them in the darkness."

"A good suggestion," said Pescara. "I will act upon it."

Later on in the day, a council was held by the leaders, during which various plans were discussed. When the assemblage broke up, Bourbon retired to the apartments which had been prepared for himself and his suite in the palace.

Next morning betimes he prepared to start for the camp. His escort was drawn up in the courtyard of the palace, and he was coming forth to mount his charger, when loud shouts were heard outside the gates, and in another moment, Pescara, followed by a band of horse soldiers, laden with baggage and other spoils of war, rode into the court.

The accoutrements of the Spanish general and those of his men showed they had been engaged in a desperate fray. Their horses were covered with dust and blood, and scarcely able to stand — the only one amongst them that did not look thoroughly

exhausted was the general's barb. Springing from the saddle, the indefatigable Pescara marched towards Bourbon, and bade him good day.

"What! back already, marquis?" cried Bourbon. "By my faith! you have displayed extraordinary activity. Why, Robecco must be some seven leagues from Milan. I perceive you have succeeded in your nocturnal expedition, and have brought back plenty of spoil. I pray you give me some particulars of the enterprise."

"Willingly," replied Pescara, smiling. "I care not ordinarily to talk of my own feats, but I am proud of this achievement, since I have defeated the hitherto invincible Bayard. And now for the affair. At the head of three hundred picked men, scarce half of whom I have brought back, I left Milan an hour before midnight, and by two o'clock was close upon Robecco, which, as your highness has just remarked, is about seven leagues distant. All was still within the little camp and in the village adjoining, and as we listened we could hear the cocks crowing, heralding the approach of dawn. It was very dark, but my men, as your highness had recommended, wore their shirts above their accoutrements. After a brief halt, we moved as silently as we could towards the camp; but, cautious as was our approach, it was detected by the guard, who at once gave the

alarm. On this, we dashed into the camp and seized upon the baggage. While we were thus employed, the trumpets sounded, and our foemen sprang to arms, and mounted their horses. But, ere this could be accomplished, we had committed great havoc among them, and had secured the baggage, which, as your highness perceives, we have brought off."

"Where was Bayard all this while?" demanded Bourbon.

"Ill and in his tent when we came up, as I subsequently learnt from a captive," returned Pescara, "but ere many minutes he was on horseback, and rallying his men. He shouted to De Lorges, who was with him, to get the infantry together and retire with them to Abbiate-Grasso, and he protected their retreat with his lances. Thrice did I charge him — and each time with a considerable loss; but I so thinned his ranks, that he was compelled to follow the infantry. Knowing that assistance would soon arrive, and that I should be overpowered by numbers, I then gave the word to return. Bonnivet chased us for a couple of leagues, when, finding pursuit in vain, he turned back. I have lost more than a hundred brave fellows in the expedition — but what of that? I have vanquished Bayard."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Bourbon. "You may well

be proud of the achievement, marquis. Bayard will never forgive Bonnivet for the defeat."

"Never," replied Pescara. "Alarcon, my captain, heard him say to De Lorges that in due time and place he would compel the Admiral to render him an account for the disgrace he had put upon him."

Bourbon then took leave of Pescara, and, mounting his charger, rode out of the city, and put himself at the head of six thousand lanz-knechts and five hundred lances, who were drawn up outside the Porta Ticinese. With this force he proceeded to join the Imperial army, which was encamped near Gambolo, a small town about three leagues distant from the right bank of the Ticino.

V.

The Contessa di Chieri.

One night, about a week before Bourbon's entrance into Milan, a lady, young and of surpassing loveliness, was seated alone in the principal saloon of a magnificent palace in the Corso Romano. Her looks and rich attire proclaimed that she belonged to the highest rank. The saloon was sumptuously furnished, and adorned with paintings and sculpture, but it was imperfectly illumined by a couple of tapers placed on the table near which the lady sat. She was the Contessa di Chieri, one of the loveliest women in Italy, and had been married long enough to care little for the count her husband, who lived apart from her at Rome.

After a while, the beautiful countess arose, and, walking to the open casement, stepped out upon a balcony overlooking the Corso, and, leaning upon the cushioned balustrade, gazed around. From this place could be seen the marble roof of the Duomo, rising like a snowy mountain above the tops of the adjoining houses. But no object in particular engaged her fancy. It was pleasant to look forth on such a night and breathe the soft and

balmy air. Therefore she lingered for some time on the balcony, and did not think of returning to the saloon.

When the Contessa di Chieri first came out, bands of soldiers were traversing the Corso, but the place was now almost deserted. As the night advanced, its beauty seemed to increase, and the perfect stillness added to the charm. She was gazing at the heavens, trying to penetrate their mysterious depths, when all at once a slight sound recalled her to earth, and, looking down, she beheld a tall cavalier wrapped in a long mantle. At this sight she would instantly have retreated, when her own name, pronounced in accents that were familiar to her, and that made the blood rush to her heart, arrested her.

"'Tis I, Beata!" cried the cavalier.

"Santa Maria! is it possible? — you here!"

"Hush! not so loud," rejoined the cavalier, "or yonder patrol will overhear us. Since you recognise me, you will not keep me here."

"You shall be admitted instantly," replied the countess. And she disappeared from the balcony.

The cavalier had not to wait long. The gates opening upon the cortile of the palace were closed, but a wicket was presently opened, and a female attendant, without saying a word to the cavalier,

led him up a grand marble staircase to the saloon where the countess awaited him. As soon as the attendant had retired, the cavalier threw off his cloak and hat, and disclosed the noble features and superb person of Bonnivet.

"Ah, what risk you have run to come here!" exclaimed the countess. "I tremble to think of it. If you should be discovered —"

"Reassure yourself, dear Beata, I shall not be discovered," replied Bonnivet, passionately. "Oh, let me gaze at you! Let me satisfy myself that I behold you once more. By Heaven!" he exclaimed, yet more passionately, and pressing her to his bosom, "you look lovelier than ever. Oh, Beata, I would have laid siege to Milan to procure the happiness of this interview. But fortune has been against me, and has baffled all my efforts."

"And you have quitted the camp to come here?" said the countess. "You have risked more than life in doing so."

"But I am now fully repaid," he rejoined.

"You would persuade me that you love me deeply," she said.

"Have I not proved my devotion by this act?" he rejoined. "Lovers, they say, are mad, and those who understand not what love is, and have never felt its pains, would deem me mad. Impelled by

this madness, or passion — call it what you please — I have left my army to the care of the Comte de Saint-Pol, and have ventured among my enemies. But he who dares much will be rewarded, as I am."

"How did you contrive to enter the city?" demanded Beata. "I marvel how you could elude the vigilance of the guard."

"I have a safe-conduct from Giovanny de' Medici," replied Bonnivet. "I came hither as Galeazzo Visconti."

"But your return will be attended with even greater risk," said Beata. "If you should be captured, I shall never forgive myself, for I shall feel that I have been the cause of the disaster."

"Have no misgivings, Beata," said Bonnivet, smiling confidently. "I am not destined to be captured. Do not let us mar the happiness of our brief interview by any thoughts of danger. Let us think only of ourselves — of our love. When we are separated — when I am again with the army, and you are alone in this chamber — we shall regret each moment we have wasted."

"I would shake off my fears if I could," said the countess. "But I find it impossible. Had I expected you, it might have been otherwise. But you have taken me so by surprise, that I cannot master my emotion."

"How could I prepare you for my coming, Beata?" said Bonnivet. "I have long nourished the design, but the means of executing it only occurred to-day, when this safe-conduct fell into my hands. Then I resolved — cost what it might! — that I would behold you again. Mounted on a swift steed, I left Abbiate-Grasso at nightfall, attended only by a single esquire, and I hope to be back at the camp before my absence is discovered."

"Heaven grant you may!" she ejaculated.

"My steed seemed to know the errand on which he was bent, and bore me on with wondrous speed; but if he sympathises with his master, he will not have the same spirit on his return. It is strange, Beata — now that the long wished-for moment has arrived — now that I am here — I cannot realise my happiness. It seems like a dream."

"Holy Virgin! what is that?" exclaimed Beata, as the trampling of horses was heard in the Corso.

"Merely the patrol," replied Bonnivet.

"No; it is not the patrol!" she cried. "The troop has stopped at the gates of the palace. Stay where you are! I will see what it means."

So saying, she flew to the balcony, and presently returned with a cheek blanched with terror.

"Heaven preserve us!" she exclaimed. "It is the Duke of Milan, with a large escort."

"The Duke of Milan!" exclaimed Bonnivet. "What can bring him here at this hour?"

As he spoke, a loud knocking was heard at the gate.

"What means this visit?" said Bonnivet.

"I know not," replied the countess, "unless your arrival at Milan has been discovered."

"That is impossible. The guard at the Porta Romana allowed me to pass without question, on seeing my safe-conduct."

"There are spies in your camp, and one of them may have brought information of your departure," said Beata. "But the duke must not find you here. Conceal yourself," she added, opening the door of a closet, "and do not venture forth till I release you."

Scarcely had Bonnivet entered this hiding-place when the Duke of Milan, accompanied by a guard, entered the saloon.

"You must excuse me if I appear abrupt, countess," he said, glancing suspiciously round the room. "My business does not admit of ceremony. You will believe that I have not come hither on any idle errand."

"I am curious to learn the meaning of your highness's visit," remarked Beata, vainly endeavouring to conceal her agitation.

"I will not keep you in suspense, madame," replied Sforza. "Where is the cavalier who entered the palace not half an hour ago, and was shown into this room by your attendant, Eufemia?"

"He is lost!" mentally ejaculated the countess, trembling and not knowing what answer to make.

"Where is the Admiral Bonnivet, madame?" said Sforza, advancing towards her. "I know he is in the palace. Where have you hidden him? Confess. I *will* have him."

"The cavalier who entered just now, and who has since quitted the palace, was not Bonnivet, but Galeazzo Visconti," replied the countess.

"I know better, madame," said Sforza. "To convince you that equivocation is useless, I will tell you what has happened. Little more than an hour ago two well-mounted horsemen arrived at the Porta Romana, and presented a safe-conduct purporting to be for Galeazzo Visconti and his esquire. What was the astonishment of the captain of the guard, while scrutinising the self-styled Visconti — the real Galeazzo being well known to him — to recognise the commander of the French army, the Admiral Bonnivet. He made no remark, however, but allowed the Admiral and his companion to enter the city, feeling it to be of the highest importance to ascertain their design. He therefore followed them

with half a dozen men to the Piazza del Duomo, where Bonnivet dismounted, and leaving his horse in charge of his esquire, marched off, fancying himself unobserved — but the captain of the guard and and two soldiers were on his track. They saw him pause before this palace. You, countess, were on the balcony. They heard your lover — for such he must be — exchange a few words with you, after which he was admitted. As soon as this took place, the captain of the guard hastened to the ducal palace to acquaint me with the important discovery he had made. I came hither at once."

"You have come quickly, duke, but you have come too late," rejoined Beata. "He you seek is gone."

"Not so, madame," rejoined Sforza, smiling incredulously. "The gates have been closely watched ever since the Admiral entered the palace. No one has come forth. Where is he?"

"If your highness will dismiss your attendants, I will tell you," she replied.

"Withdraw," said Sforza to the guard, "but remain outside. Now, madame?" he added, when they were alone.

Before the countess could make any reply the door of the closet opened, and Bonnivet stepped forth.

"Imprudent!" she exclaimed. "You have betrayed yourself."

"Discovery was certain, madame," remarked Sforza. "I am obliged to the Lord Admiral for saving me further trouble. My lord, you are my prisoner."

"Not yet, duke," rejoined Bonnivet, who did not appear at all uneasy; "I have a proposition to make to your highness, which I think will be agreeable to you. You must be quite certain that I did not come to Milan with any hostile intent."

"I do not ask the motive of your visit, my lord," replied Sforza. "It is sufficient that you are here — and my prisoner."

"Hear me out, duke," said Bonnivet. "I have to propose an exchange of prisoners."

"An exchange! — ha! Whom do you offer?"

"Giovanni de' Medici," replied Bonnivet.

"Giovanni de' Medici!" echoed Sforza, in surprise. "I did not know he was a prisoner."

"I took him this morning," returned Bonnivet. "Let me return to Abbiate-Grasso, and I will set him free."

"You underrate yourself, Admiral," said Sforza. "I shall lose by the exchange."

"I will add ten thousand ducats," said Bonnivet.

"Excuse the doubt, my lord; but have you that sum?" demanded Sforza.

"On my faith I have, duke," replied Bonnivet. "The money ought to be paid to the Swiss — but you shall have it."

"Then I agree. I am sorry to rob the Swiss," said Sforza, laughing, "but all is fair in love and war. I give you an hour with your mistress, Admiral. Then you must depart. I will leave a guard at the gate of the palace who will conduct you and your esquire to the Porta Romana. To-morrow I shall expect Giovanni de' Medici — and the ransom money. Good night, my lord. I will no longer interrupt your tête-à-tête. You see, fair countess, what a price your lover is willing to pay for an hour of your sweet society."

With this, Sforza retired and gave the necessary orders, so that Bonnivet was enabled to quit Milan without molestation.

Next morning, Giovanni de' Medici returned to Milan, and the ransom-money was paid.

VI.

How Bourbon assumed the Command of the Imperial Army.

The numerical force of the Imperial army at this juncture was computed at forty thousand men, a large proportion of whom were mercenaries. There were seven thousand Spaniards under Pescara; ten thousand Germans under Lannoy; four thousand Italians under Giovanni de' Medici; eight hundred lances, and eight hundred light horse, mixed Italians and Spaniards, under various captains. The Venetian army, under the Duke of Urbino, consisted of upwards of six thousand foot, all well armed, and eleven hundred horse. The Pontifical forces, the leadership of which was given to Gonzaga, numbered a thousand men — five hundred infantry and five hundred horse. Besides these, there was a strong garrison at Pavia, under the command of the renowned Antonio de Leyva, consisting of five thousand infantry and eleven hundred horse, and these were subsequently reinforced by the Pontifical troops. Possessed of such an army, led by generals of such valour and experience as Pescara and Lannoy, and now commanded by Bourbon, who

was animated as well by the desire of distinction as by the thirst for vengeance, it could scarcely be doubted that success awaited the Imperialists.

On the other hand, though its numbers had been greatly reduced since his entrance into Italy, Bonnivet could still boast a powerful army. Of the thirty thousand men who had descended with him into the fertile plains of Lombardy, scarce twenty thousand were now left; but he was in expectation of large reinforcements from France, and he also counted upon five thousand Grisons under the command of Dietingen de Salis, and eight thousand Swiss. From his position at Abbiate-Grasso, he was able to obtain abundant supplies from the Lomellino.

Such was the relative position of the two armies when Bourbon assumed the command of the Imperial forces.

On his arrival at the camp he was hailed with enthusiasm, and as he rode along the line, followed by his adherents, he was greeted with shouts by soldiers of all countries — Spaniards, Germans, and Italians. This was a proud moment for the illustrious fugitive, and made amends for all the sufferings he had undergone. His breast beat high with ardour, and visions of conquest flitted before his gaze. With such a host at his command, what could he not achieve?

The camp of the Imperialists occupied a large space of ground, but owing to the remarkable flatness of the plain, could only be fully surveyed from the castle of Garlasco, which was situated at its farthest extremity. In this castle Bourbon was lodged, and as he mounted its keep a splendid view was offered him. Not only was the whole of his own army in sight, but, though some leagues off, he could clearly distinguish the French camp at Abbiate-Grasso. In other respects, the prospect was very striking. League upon league of the fertile plains of Lombardy, intersected with rivers and canals, came within his ken. Numberless cities, towns, and villages could be descried. In the extreme distance could be seen Milan, with its Duomo, towers, and churches; Lodi and Pavia were also distinguishable; and the whole course of the Ticino could be traced from the latter city to Abbiate-Grasso. Looking towards the north, Novara and Vercelli — both important places — could be discerned; and nearer were Vigevano and Mortara. Many other towns could likewise be seen, and the Ticino was not the only river visible. Both the Sesia and the Po could be distinguished. Bounding this vast plain on the north rose the enormous barrier of the Alps, foremost amid which stood Monte Rosa, while in the far distance on the west could be discerned the range of the Apennines.

From the walls of Garlasco, Bourbon carefully studied Bonnivet's position, and coming to the conclusion that the French general must infallibly surrender, he resolved not to give him battle at once, as he had intended, but to adopt the Fabian policy of Prospero Colonna, and wait.

To Bourbon a camp life was the pleasantest that could be led. No music was so agreeable to his ear as the sound of warlike instruments; no pastime so pleasant as the practice of military manœuvres. He did not rest till he had satisfied himself by personal scrutiny that every corps of the army was in good order; and such was his affability, that he soon became popular with the soldiers of each nation. At all hours of the night he made his rounds to see that good watch was kept; and on these occasions he was only attended by the faithful Hugues, whom he still retained in his service. Constant nocturnal skirmishes took place between flying bands of the hostile armies; but without material advantage to either side.

Nearly a month had now elapsed since Bourbon had assumed his command, and already Bonnivet, whose position became daily more perilous, had thrice offered him battle; but Bourbon, with the approval of the other leaders, on each occasion refused to fight. During this interval Bourbon, accompanied

by Lannoy, Pescara, and the Duke of Urbino, had repeatedly ridden along the right bank of the Ticino, in order to reconnoitre the French forces; and he had also more than once visited Pavia to consult with Antonio de Leyva and Gonzaga, and see that the garrison was in good order.

VII.

How Bonnivet resolved to retreat from Novara.

Becoming apprehensive that he should lose his supplies from the Lomellino, whence he chiefly derived them, Bonnivet at length crossed the Ticino with the bulk of his army, placing his vanguard at Vigevano, and the main body of the army at Mortara — a strongly fortified city, and where he could obtain provisions from Montferrat, Vercelli, and Novara.

He did not abandon Abbiate-Grasso, but left a thousand infantry and a hundred horse to guard the place — a very inadequate force, as was speedily shown. Three days afterwards, the town was attacked by Giovanni de' Medici, assisted by Sforza, with five hundred of the élite of the garrison of Milan. The assault began early in the morning, and was conducted with such extraordinary vigour, that, in spite of a gallant defence, the place was taken before night. Fatal consequences, however, attended this bold achievement. The plague at that time existed at Abbiate-Grasso, and the spoils of the town being carried off by the victors, the scourge

was conveyed to Milan, and eventually committed dreadful ravages in that city.

The capture of Abbiate-Grasso was not the only success achieved by the Imperialists. Others followed in rapid succession. Sartirano, an important post occupied by the French, was besieged and taken by Bourbon before Bonnivet could succour it from Mortara. As the Imperialists continued to press upon his right, fearing his supplies might be cut off he retired to Novara, and established himself there, hoping to be reinforced by the Grisons and Swiss. But he was disappointed. Conducted by Dietingen de Salis, the Grisons got as far as Bergamo, where they ought to have been joined by the Prince Federico da Bozzolo. But he was shut up in Lodi. Harassed by Giovanni de' Medici, who was sent with a detachment of light horse to drive them back, unable to obtain their promised pay or an escort of cavalry, the Grisons, disgusted and indignant, returned to their native valleys. Having accomplished this task, the active Medici destroyed the bridge at Buffalora, thus enclosing Bonnivet between the Ticino and the Sesia, and liberating Milan from all chance of attack.

Bonnivet was not more fortunate in regard to his Swiss reinforcements than with the Grisons. Eight thousand of these hardy mountaineers made

their way to the neighbourhood of Vercelli, on the right bank of the Sesia, in order to effect a junction with the French army at Novara. But the river was swollen and impassable, and the Swiss, having learned that the Grisons had retired, became greatly discontented, and refused to join the French until they first received their pay. In vain Bonnivet sent Captain Diesbach to remonstrate with them. They remained sullen and inflexible, alleging that the French king had broken faith with them, having failed to send the Duc de Longueville with four hundred lances to Ivry to escort them, and now they were denied their pay.

The Admiral's position had thus become extremely perilous. Deprived of the large reinforcements he had expected, and which alone could enable him successfully to prosecute the campaign; confronted by a hostile army greatly superior to his own in number, and stimulated by constant successes; with his own troops almost decimated by disease and famine; in danger of losing his supplies, owing to the activity of the enemy, his utter defeat or an inglorious surrender seemed inevitable.

Bonnivet determined to retreat, but before putting his design into execution, he summoned the principal leaders of the French army to a council. With the exception of the Maréchal de Montmorency, who

had been attacked by the plague, and had already left Novara, they all attended; and the assemblage comprised the Comte de Saint-Pol, the Seigneur de Vandenesse, the Chevalier Bayard, the Vidame de Chartres, De Lorges, Annebaut, Beauvais (surnamed "the Brave"), Renzo da Ceri, and the Swiss captain, Diesbach. All these personages were fully armed, save that they had taken off their helmets and unbuckled their swords, and, as they were grouped around a table placed in the centre of the tent in which they met, they formed a very striking picture.

Conspicuous among them for the richness of his armour, which was damaskeened with gold, and for his splendid person and handsome lineaments, was the Lord Admiral. The Comte de Saint-Pol was also a noble-looking warrior, and gorgeously accoutred. The veteran Vandenesse was cased in black armour, and had a martial and determined aspect. The Vidame de Chartres had a proud and resolute look. Annebaut, De Lorges, and the brave Beauvais were all stalwart captains, whose scarred visages proclaimed the numerous conflicts they had been engaged in. Renzo da Ceri was of slighter frame, and younger than the last-mentioned warriors, and his graceful person, sheathed in lacquered armour, contrasted strongly with the robust frame

and rugged physiognomy of the Swiss leader, Diesbach, near whom he sat.

But, although each individual in the group was worthy of notice, the one who would infallibly have fixed the attention of a beholder was the Chevalier Bayard.

Bayard was fashioned in the heroic mould. Above the ordinary height, powerfully built, and possessed of prodigious strength, he wore his ponderous armour, dinted by many a blow, as easily as if it had been a silken doublet. His features corresponded with his frame, being massive and nobly sculptured, generally stern in expression, yet sometimes lighted up by a pleasant smile.

The doughty champion was now approaching fifty, and though his mighty arm had lost none of its power, and his features bore few traces of age, his once raven locks were thickly sown with grey. It had been remarked by his soldiers, by whom he was idolised, that since the affair of Robecco their captain had looked sombre and discontented, and they fancied that the thought of the defeat rankled in his breast.

More than human valour seemed to beat in Bayard's broad breast — more than human strength appeared to reside in his herculean frame and powerful arm. No danger ever appalled him — nay, his

spirit rose with danger, inciting him to deeds worthy of the heroic ages. Such was his conduct at Garigliano, when, wholly unsupported, he defended the bridge against the entire Spanish host, and saved the French army. Besides the inconceivable daring of all his actions, their grandeur made him the central figure in every conflict in which he engaged, and excited the admiration both of friends and foes.

When only eighteen, Bayard followed Charles VIII. into Italy, and won his spurs at the battle of Fornova, where he performed prodigies of valour, and had two horses killed under him. He was several times made prisoner, and more than once grievously wounded, but while free he was ever with the army. Courts he despised, and hence the neglect he experienced from François I., who placed his favourites over his head. But other monarchs appreciated him at his true worth, and after a signal victory which he had gained at Padua, the Emperor Maximilian said to him, in the presence of the whole army, "Chevalier Bayard, the king my brother is happy in having a knight like you. I would I had a dozen such, even though each cost me a hundred thousand florins a year."

Nor did our own bluff King Hal use less flattering language towards him at the siege of Térouanne.

"Were all French captains as valiant as you, Chevalier Bayard," said Henry, "I must speedily raise the siege of this place."

Bayard, as is well known, after the famous battle of Marignano, which he himself had helped to win, and where he fought side by side with the Constable de Bourbon, was called upon by the victorious king to dub him knight.

Bayard would have declined the honour, but François insisted, and bent the knee before him. Whereupon Bayard, drawing his sword, and touching the king's shoulder with the blade, exclaimed:

"Sire, may it be with you as with Roland or Oliver, Godfrey or Baldwin, his brother. Certes, you are the first king that ever I dubbed knight." Then pressing his lips to the blade, he said, "Happy art thou, my sword, to have performed this office for so brave a monarch! Henceforth, good sword, shalt thou be kept as a holy relic, and honoured above all other weapons!"

But though thus distinguished, Bayard, as we have shown, was afterwards neglected by François I. The bravest and ablest captain in the army; consulted by the leaders on all occasions of difficulty, and adored by the soldiers; far fitter for command than those placed above him, he was never made a

general. The only reward he received for his incalculable services was the order of Saint Michel.

Though his loyalty was unshaken by the king's ingratitude, the appointment of Bonnivet to the supreme command of the Italian army gave Bayard great offence. He could not conquer his dislike of the haughty favourite, and, moreover, entertained but a poor opinion of his military qualities. Nevertheless, he served him well and faithfully. In the unlucky affair of Robecco he fancied Bonnivet had wilfully exposed him to certain defeat, and this he could not forgive.

"I have sent for you, messeigneurs, to ask your advice," said Bonnivet, glancing round at the assemblage, all of whom looked grave and anxious, "and I entreat you to give it freely. You are all aware of the critical position in which we are placed. You know that we are shut up between two rivers, the Ticino and the Sesia. You know that the army is greatly reduced by famine, sickness, and desertion, and that the enemy, with a force more than double our own in number, is at Cameriano, only two leagues off. You know that we have lost Abbiate-Grasso, and that the bridge over the Ticino at Buffalora has been destroyed by Giovanni de' Medici. You know that the faithless Grisons have returned to their native valleys with Dietingen de Salis. You know

that the eight thousand Swiss, who are at Gattinara, on the opposite bank of the Sesia, have refused to join us. Aware of all these disastrous circumstances, what counsel do you give?"

All were silent, none liking to recommend retreat or surrender. At last Bayard spoke.

"You ask our advice, Lord Admiral," he said. "Will you be guided by it if we offer it?"

"I cannot pledge myself to that, but I will give your counsel due consideration," rejoined Bonnivet. "Speak freely."

"Were I in your place," said Bayard, "I would compel the enemy to give me battle, and by a grand masterstroke retrieve my former reverses, or perish in the effort."

"It would be madness," rejoined Bonnivet. "As I have said, the enemy's forces are double our own, and in better condition."

"Then shut yourself up in Novara, and stand a siege. The city is well fortified, and will hold out till we receive reinforcements."

"I doubt it," remarked the Comte de Saint-Pol. "Our supplies from the Lomellino will be cut off, and the country around Novara, as you know, has been laid waste."

"Tête-Dieu! we will get supplies from the foe," cried Bayard. "Our condition is not so desperate

as you suppose. If the enemy are two to one, what matters it?"

"If we were all Bayards it would matter little if they were ten to one," rejoined Saint-Pol. "But our men are disheartened. Of late, we have had nothing but ill success. You yourself have been worsted."

"True," replied Bayard, in a sombre tone, as he thought of the affair of Robecco.

"You have seen your countrymen, Captain Diesbach," said De Lorges to that officer. "Do they refuse to join us?"

"Absolutely," replied Diesbach, "unless they receive their pay. They are inflexible. They declare the King of France has broken faith with them in not sending the Duc de Longueville with an escort of cavalry to meet them at Ivry, and that they will not fight for him."

"Let the vile mercenaries go! We can do without them," cried Beauvais.

"Mercenaries they may be, but they have good ground of complaint," rejoined Diesbach, angrily. "They have been brought hither by promises that have not been kept. My own men declare that, unless they receive their pay, they will at once disband, and return with their countrymen who are

waiting for them at Gattinara. The Swiss will not fight for mere glory."

"But you have sufficient influence over your men to quiet their murmurs, and prevent them from disbanding, Captain Diesbach," said Bonnivet. "Give them the positive assurance from me that they *shall* be paid — speedily paid."

"Promises will not content them, my lord," replied Diesbach. "I must have something in hand."

"You ask an impossibility, captain," replied Bonnivet. "My coffers are quite empty."

"Quite empty!" exclaimed Diesbach. "A month ago you promised me ten thousand ducats."

"Very true, captain. But the whole of the money is gone. I have had a heavy ransom to pay."

"Whose ransom, my lord, may I make bold to inquire?" said Diesbach.

"Ask the Duke of Milan," replied Bonnivet. "My coffers are empty, I repeat. But all arrears shall be fully paid — as soon as I receive the expected supplies from France."

"I will tell my soldiers what you say, my lord," returned Diesbach. "But I know what their answer will be. They will laugh in my face, disband, and cross the Sesia to join their comrades. If such should be the case, I must perforce accompany them."

"I shall not hinder you, captain," said Bonnivet. "Dissuade them, if you can — if not, adieu!"

"It pains me to separate from you thus, my brave companions in arms, but there is no help for it," rejoined Diesbach. And bowing to the Admiral and the assembled leaders, who returned his salutation coldly, he quitted the tent.

"By this desertion of the Swiss we shall lose five thousand auxiliaries," said Bonnivet. "Nothing is left but retreat."

"Tête-Dieu! we are not yet come to that pass," cried Bayard. "Again I say, let us provoke the enemy to battle. If we do not conquer, we shall die with honour."

"How say you, messeigneurs?" demanded Bonnivet. "I have every faith in the Chevalier Bayard, but he is sometimes too rash. I will be governed by the general voice. Shall we risk an engagement?"

"No," replied the leaders, unanimously. "It is too hazardous."

"You are overruled, you see, Chevalier Bayard," said Bonnivet.

"You will regret your determination, my lord," rejoined Bayard, chafing fiercely. "If you retreat, Bourbon will say you are afraid of him."

"I shall not be turned from my purpose by a

taunt," said Bonnivet. "I will not sacrifice my men."

"Then you decide upon immediate retreat?" demanded the Comte de Saint-Pol.

"Such is my decision," replied Bonnivet. "To-morrow night I shall quit Novara and march to Romagnano. If I can get the army safely across the Sesia, all will be well."

"Think not to elude Bourbon," remarked Bayard. "The thirst of vengeance will make him doubly vigilant. He will assuredly cut off our retreat."

"The design must be kept so secret that no intelligence can be conveyed to him," said Bonnivet. "To you, De Lorges," he added to that captain, "I confide the construction of the bridge of boats across the Sesia. Set out for Romagnano to-night."

"Your commands shall be obeyed, general," returned De Lorges. "On your arrival at Romagnano, you shall find the bridge ready for the passage of the army."

"Use all possible caution," said Vandenesse. "If Bourbon hears of the bridge, he will guess the design."

"He shall *not* hear of it," returned De Lorges. "Not a soul shall quit Romagnano."

"Then all is settled," said Bonnivet. "We will

meet again at noon to-morrow, when the order of march can be finally arranged."

"At what hour do you propose to set out?" demanded Saint-Pol.

"At dusk," replied Bonnivet. "Each leader will have his corps in readiness. You, Saint-Pol, will take charge of the first battalion. To you, Vandenesse, I confide the artillery. Chevalier Bayard, you will bring up the rear-guard. I shall be with you."

On this the council broke up, and the leaders quitted the tent.

VIII.

In which Bayard relates his Dream to De Lorges.

Bonnivet quitted Novara as agreed upon, and marched throughout the night, but he did not reach Romagnano until late in the afternoon of the following day, the progress of the troops being much impeded by the bad state of the roads; but as the men were greatly fatigued by their hurried march, he determined to give them a few hours' repose, and to defer the passage of the river until the following morning at daybreak. In this decision he acted against the opinion of Bayard, who advised him to cross at once (the bridge of boats having been completed by De Lorges), and take up his quarters on the opposite bank of the Sesia, but Bonnivet would not be turned from his purpose.

"We are better here than at Gattinara, which is full of mutinous Swiss," he said. "I have no apprehension of attack. Long before the enemy can come up, we shall have crossed the river and destroyed the bridge."

Bayard said no more. But he could not shake off his misgivings.

That evening the valiant knight rode through the camp alone. It was still early, but the greater part of the soldiers, fatigued by their long march, and knowing they must be astir soon after midnight, had already sought a couch, and were buried in slumber. Some few were awake, and were furbishing their arms and accoutrements. Having ascertained that good watch was kept by the advanced guard, Bayard quitted the camp and rode towards the river to view the bridge of boats.

It was an enchanting evening — such as only can be seen in a southern clime. The deep dark vault of heaven was without a cloud, and not a breath of wind was stirring. The sounds customarily heard in a camp alone broke the stillness.

Before he approached the river, Bayard halted to gaze on the lovely and peaceful scene — for peaceful it looked, though a large army was nigh at hand. From the spot where the knight had halted a magnificent view of the Alps was obtained, and his eye wandered along the mighty range till it rested upon the snow-clad peaks of Monte Rosa. Strange to say, even at that moment, when the rest of the ridge looked white and spectral, a warm radiance tinged the summit of this superb mountain.

Never in his eyes had the eternal Alps looked so grand and solemn as they did on that evening —

the last he was destined to witness. He could not remove his gaze from them, and the contemplation of the magnificent picture insensibly lifted his thoughts towards Heaven, and drew from him a heartfelt prayer. He then rode slowly on towards the river. On either side his view was obstructed by trees, and by the luxuriant vegetation of the country. The Sesia, which took its course through the broad plains of Lombardy to mingle its waters with those of the classic Po, was here of no great width, and could ordinarily be forded, but heavy rains had rendered it for the time impassable. The banks of the river were skirted by tall poplars.

Adjoining the picturesque little town of Romagnano, which was built on the near bank of the river, were the ruins of an old bridge, which had been destroyed by Lautrec during the late campaign, and it was close to these broken arches and piers that De Lorges had constructed the bridge of boats.

Farther down the river, about half a league off, could be seen Gattinara, a town about the same size as Romagnano. As we have intimated, the whole country was one flat fertile plain, extending almost over the whole of Lombardy to the foot of the Alps. A strong mounted guard was stationed near the bridge, and as Bayard drew near, the leader of the

guard, who was no other than De Lorges, rode towards him.

"Good even, noble captain," said De Lorges. "What think you of the bridge?"

"It will answer its purpose," rejoined Bayard. "But I would it were destroyed."

"That is, were you with the army on the other side of the river. So do I. We ought to have crossed to-night. Why wait till morning?"

"Ay, why?" cried Bayard, angrily. "Simply because the Admiral has so decided. He says the men are worn out, and must have repose. Methinks they could have rested at Gattinara. To-morrow may be too late."

"Let us hope not," said De Lorges. "I do not think the enemy can have divined our purpose."

"I think differently," rejoined Bayard. "I believe that Bourbon is in hot pursuit of us."

"But you have no grounds for such belief?" said De Lorges, inquiringly.

"None save the conviction that he will not let Bonnivet escape. Well, if the Admiral chooses to indulge in false security, we cannot help it. For my own part, I am full of apprehension."

"It is not like you to feel uneasiness," said De Lorges. "We shall laugh at such fears at this hour to-morrow."

"Who knows that either of us may be then alive!" ejaculated Bayard, gravely. "I do not think I shall. Not many minutes ago, as I was gazing at yon mighty mountains, a presentiment crossed me that I should never behold another evening."

"Shake off these melancholy thoughts!" cried De Lorges. "A long and glorious career awaits you."

"Alas! no," replied Bayard. "I am prepared to meet the blow whenever it may come; but I cannot quit this fair world without some regret. Listen to me, De Lorges, and recollect what I am about to say to you. My uncle, Georges du Terrail, Bishop of Grenoble, who took charge of me during my infancy, thus admonished me: 'My child,' he said, in a tone and with a look which I can well remember, 'be worthy of your ancestors. Be noble, like the founder of our race, who fell at the feet of King John at the battle of Poitiers. Be valiant like your great-grandsire and your grandsire, both of whom died in arms — the first at Agincourt, the other at Montlhéry. Prove yourself the true son of your intrepid father, and my beloved brother, who fell covered with honourable wounds while defending his country.' Thus spake the pious and good Bishop of Grenoble, who loved me as a son. I have striven to follow his injunctions. I have sought to emulate

the glorious deeds of my ancestors, and I have done no act that could be deemed unworthy of their name. I have prayed that I might not die on a bed of sickness, but on the battle-field, and I trust that Heaven will grant my prayer."

"I nothing doubt it, noble captain," said De Lorges, deeply moved. "But may the day be far hence!"

"It is close at hand, De Lorges. I am sure of it," said Bayard, in a tone that startled his hearer. "I dreamed last night that all my valiant ancestors appeared to me. I knew them, though I had seen none of them before, except my father, and his features had faded from my recollection. But I knew them all. Warlike phantoms they were. The Bishop of Grenoble, who has long been laid in the tomb, was with them. Their lips moved, but I could hear no words, and I vainly essayed to address them, for my tongue clove to my palate. But I could not mistake the meaning of their looks and gestures. The ghostly warriors gave me welcome, and the good bishop smiled upon me. I shall soon join them."

There was a pause. De Lorges was too much impressed by what he had heard to make a remark.

"I have lived long enough," pursued Bayard, breaking the silence — "too long, perhaps, for I

ought to have died at Robecco. My chief regret in quitting the world is, that I have not done enough for my country."

"Then live!" cried De Lorges. "France can ill spare you."

"My life is in the hands of my Maker," rejoined Bayard, humbly. "I shall resign it cheerfully to Him who gave it — but I shall not throw it away. And now a word to you, my friend and companion-in-arms. I am the last of my line. I have no son to whom I can say, 'Live worthily of your ancestors,' but I can say to you, De Lorges, whom I love as a brother, Live, so that your name may be without reproach."

"I will try to do so," replied the valiant captain, earnestly.

"I am poor, as you know," pursued Bayard, "for such money as I have won I have bestowed upon my soldiers, but if I fall, I bequeath you my sword — the sword with which I bestowed knighthood upon the king. Take it, and may it serve you as well as it has served me. Adieu!"

And, without another word, he rode back to the camp, while De Lorges returned to his post.

IX.

The Retreat of Romagnano.

As Bayard had conjectured, Bonnivet's departure from Novara had not escaped the vigilance of Bourbon, who immediately started in pursuit with the whole of the Imperial army. The march endured from early morn till late at night, when men and horses became so much fatigued, that a few hours' rest appeared indispensable. But Bourbon would not consent to a halt.

"We are only a few leagues from Romagnano," he said. "We must on."

"The enemy cannot cross the Sesia," urged Pescara. "The river is flooded, and there is no bridge."

"A bridge of boats will enable them to cross," said Bourbon. "I am certain Bonnivet will make the attempt to-night — or at daybreak, at latest. If we halt, we shall lose him."

"But the men need repose. They are dropping with fatigue," urged the Duke of Urbino.

"They shall rest after the battle," rejoined Bourbon, peremptorily. "On! on!"

So the army continued its march.

At cock-crow, the trumpets of the French army sounded a loud réveillé, and the whole host arose. Then were heard the loud calls of the officers mustering their men, the clatter of arms, the neighing of steeds, and all the stirring sounds that proclaim a camp in motion.

While the tents were being struck, and the various companies forming, Bonnivet, fully armed, and attended by the leaders, rode along the line, and, having completed his inspection, issued his final orders. Each leader returned to his respective corps; the first battalion, under the command of the Comte de Saint-Pol, began to move towards Romagnano; and the remainder of the army followed; Bonnivet himself bringing up the rear-guard.

Day broke just as the first column neared the bridge, the rosy clouds in the eastern sky giving promise of a glorious day. The Alps stood out in all their majesty, not a single cloud resting upon their snowy peaks. Monte Rosa had already caught the first rays of the sun. Ere long the whole scene was flooded with light. Casques and corslets glittered in the sunbeams, lances and bills seemed tipped with fire, and pennons, banners, and plumes fluttered in the fresh morning breeze. Even the swollen waters of the Sesia looked bright and beautiful.

The bridge of boats resounded with the trampling of horse and the regular tread of the foot soldiers, as band after band crossed it in close array. It was a gay and glorious sight. Two battalions had gained the opposite bank, and the Vidame de Chartres was about to pass over with his cross-bowmen, when De Lorges galloped up.

"The enemy is at hand!" he exclaimed. "The main body of the army must be got over the bridge as rapidly as possible. The Lord Admiral will cover its passage with the rear-guard."

"Bourbon must have marched all night to come up with us," said De Chartres. "In another hour we should have been safe."

"Not a moment must be lost!" cried De Lorges. "Take your men across at once."

While the Vidame de Chartres hurried his cross-bowmen over the bridge, De Lorges clapped spurs to his steed and galloped back to the rear of the army.

Bonnivet had been taken by surprise by his implacable foe. Just as he had put the last battalion in motion, three or four scouts galloped up, shouting that the enemy was at hand; and he had only just time to form his men into line of battle when Bourbon appeared at the head of a squadron of reiters, and at once attacked him. Impetuous

as was the onset, the French gendarmerie sustained it firmly. A general conflict then ensued, during which Bourbon pressed on; and though the French disputed the ground valiantly, they were compelled slowly to retire.

Learning that Pescara was coming up with his host, the Admiral made a desperate charge, and while leading on his men he was struck by a heavy shot, which shattered his right arm, and caused a great effusion of blood. Feeling he could not much longer sit his horse, he rode to the rear and dismounted, and was soon afterwards joined by Bayard, who had succeeded in driving back the enemy.

"You are not much hurt, I trust, Admiral?" said Bayard.

"Sufficiently to place me hors de combat," replied Bonnivet, faintly. "Would to Heaven I had listened to your counsel, and crossed the river last night! But the army must not be lost through my imprudence. You perceive that I am not in a condition either to fight or lead. I confide the command to you. Save the army if possible."

"'Tis late — very late," rejoined Bayard. "But no matter. I will save the army, but it will cost me my life to do so."

"I trust not," said Bonnivet. "I hope we shall meet again, when I may thank you for the service."

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